

THE NEW TESTAMENT
Paraphrase and Comment

GEORGE STANHOPE

1751

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THE NEW TESTAMENT
PARAPHRASE AND COMMENT

Translated by: GEORGE STANHOPE, D.D.

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Jim Baden shares the reverence for Scripture that has moved the leaders of our Society to give so freely of their time and energy for the past thirty-five years. He has profound respect and gratitude for the heroes and heroines of Bible translation—from Wycliffe and Tyndale down to the present time—who worked so hard, even sometimes at the risk of life—to make the Bible so readily available to the world today. Like other members of the ISBC, Jim regards the Bible as more than just a great book to be collected. To use his own words, he speaks of the Scriptures as "God's method of communicating with his intelligent creatures . . . to be most carefully read and contemplated to discover its meaning and value for life in the present and future."

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Graham Maxwell
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Bill Chamberlain

A

PARAPHRASE AND COMMENT

UPON

THE EPISTLES AND GOSPELS

APPOINTED TO BE USED IN

THE CHURCH OF ENGLAND

ON ALL

SUNDAYS AND HOLIDAYS THROUGHOUT THE YEAR.

BY GEORGE STANHOPE, D. D.

SOMETIME DEAN OF CANTERBURY.

A NEW EDITION, IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOLUME I.

OXFORD,

AT THE UNIVERSITY PRESS.

M.DCCC.LI.

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TO THE
QUEEN'S MOST EXCELLENT MAJESTY.

MAY IT PLEASE YOUR SACRED MAJESTY;

THAT this undertaking presumes to beg your Majesty's gracious acceptance, and the patronage of your royal name, is not from any confidence the author entertains of the perfection of the work, but purely from a sense of your Majesty's ready inclination to countenance and promote every good design.

For, Madam, the ends intended to be served by the following treatise are, instructing your people in the principles and exciting them to the practice of true religion; assisting them with proper meditations at the solemn seasons of approaching God in his public worship; employing their thoughts upon passages of Scripture which prove and explain our common Christianity, and dispose to piety and virtue and peace; and particularly, making them duly sensible how wise and profitable a choice for these purposes our excellent Liturgy hath made in the yearly course of Epistles and Gospels. And to admit any manner of doubt whether such designs as these shall obtain your Majesty's protection and favour were great ingratitude, greatly injurious to the piety and goodness of such a Queen.

All we, who have the honour of waiting at the altar, do justly esteem it our unspeakable happiness that our holy exhortations from the pulpit and the press are so powerfully recommended by a royal example. For what greater satis-

faction bath any good man to wish in this world, than to see the pure doctrine of the best of Churches exemplified and adorned by the best of princes? It is thus your Majesty proves beyond all contradiction that zeal and affection for our Establishment, which you have been pleased so often and so solemnly to declare to the comfort and joy of all that love our Sion. It is thus your practice deservedly reproaches the too many who are liberal in their professions of loving her, but neglect to give the like evidence of their sincerity. It is thus that you (it ought to be presumed) will influence them to better consideration, who, did they rightly understand, could not forbear to love her.

This glory (we hope) is reserved for your Majesty's reign; to triumph over tyranny and oppression abroad, and (which is yet a nobler victory) over vice and division at home.

Of so vast importance to this Church and Nation, to the prosperity of Europe, and to the advancement of virtue and religion, is that most precious life; which that Almighty God in his mercy would prolong, and sweeten with health and all possible blessings upon your Majesty's person and your royal Consort; that the happiness of you both may be as eminently great as your mutual affection and princely qualities are conspicuous and exemplary, is the constant earnest prayer of,

May it please your Majesty,

Your Majesty's most devoted,

most obedient,

and most humble servant,

GEORGE STANHOPE.

THE PREFACE.

I THINK myself obliged to premise somewhat very briefly, as well concerning the subject treated of in the following work, as concerning the nature and design of the work itself, that so my reader, before his entrance upon the book, may understand what he is to expect, and what improvement the author hopes may result from it.

The subject treated of consists of those Collects, Epistles, and Gospels, which make a part of Divine worship upon all solemn days, in that commonly called the Communion Service. A service still in use for the keeping up, or for instructing our people in the reasons of, a more than ordinary regard to the times thus distinguished. For although the sacrament of the Lord's Supper be not, cannot be now conveniently (which yet it is much to be wished it could be and were) administered so often in all our congregations, that omission ought not, however, to hinder the retaining so much of the service as the present condition of things allows; especially when this part is so particularly edifying, that it could very ill be spared in any such assemblies, and that the instituting of our festivals and fasts must needs signify very little without it.

The Collects, first, seem to be so called, either because some very material passages of the Epistle or Gospel, or both, are here drawn so together as either to lay the foundation, or to make the matter of the petitions more especially proper for the day, or else because several requests are here compacted close into one short form. And with these I am no further concerned, than by marginal references to point out the Scriptures whence they are taken. Some of which relate to the things we ask; others express the ground upon which we ask, or the occasion of asking them at that time: all of them agree in justifying those prayers, in exposing the weakness of those who suffer themselves to be deluded, and the disingenuity of those who go about to deceive the vulgar into a dislike of our Liturgy; and this upon a frivolous pretence of these forms being taken out of the Romish mass book. Whereas the being

found there neither is to us, nor was any inducement at all to our wise and pious Reformers heretofore. But they considered that we ought to depart from the corruptions only of that Church; and when these were entirely corrected, or cast off, they rightly judged that it would have then argued a strange and even scandalous perverseness, not to retain those parts or offices, the soundness whereof was evident by their being either expressly contained in or undeniably founded upon the word of God himself.

The Epistles (for so the whole collection of them is commonly called, taking its denomination from the far greater part) are portions of Scripture chiefly consisting of moral precepts; some few excepted, which are either passages prophetic of our blessed Saviour with regard to his first or second coming; or else historical, relating the memorable acts of the saints whom the Church commemorates; or doctrinal, illustrating the ends and advantages of our Lord's actions or sufferings. Amongst those Epistles (strictly so called) some have a more immediate regard to questions of great importance between the Jews and Christians at the time when they were written: yet are they not so confined to the controversies then depending, but that they at the same time help to explain many essential points and privileges of our religion; such as are highly necessary to be understood, and capable of bringing improvement to ours and all ages of the Church.

In treating of these, I have made it my endeavour to set forth, first, their most literal sense, in agreement with the occasion which the writers seem to have had next in view; and afterwards to deduce from thence such applications as may render them of general benefit, and shew us our concern in them. And for the rest, it has been my care to enforce the duties contained in them, with arguments so suited to the subject, that every member of our Church may easily be convinced how greatly those among us are to blame who lead vicious lives: especially how false the pretence of ignorance to do better must needs be, when this short collection alone presents them with so plain a summary, so complete a body of practical religion.

In the Gospels we are furnished with the strongest evidences of our faith: the mysteries of our Lord's incarnation and nativity; the miracles he wrought; the parables he spoke; the holy exhortations he has left us, whether in public discourses to the multitudes or in private conferences with his own disciples; the history of his life and death, resurrection, and ascension into heaven; the promises

of his Holy Spirit, and predictions of the many wonderful things which his followers, thus assisted, should be enabled to perform in confirmation of the truth: these, upon the matter, make up the substance of this part of our service. Which gives us a perfect system for the establishment of our faith, as the Epistles have been observed to do for the direction of our manners.

It were therefore heartily to be wished, that the excellency and usefulness of those scriptures chosen for the instruction and edification of our people were more generally laid to heart; that men were duly sensible of the happiness of that communion in which such effectual care is taken for their souls, that all who frequent our public assemblies are secure of being taught, even there, the whole of that which is necessary to their salvation. And I hope I may take leave to recommend this (as I conceive) very reasonable instance of modesty and prudence, that such deference may be paid to the authority and wisdom of our governors, as for our flocks to make those passages of Scripture the subject of their private study and meditation which have been judged most proper for their public instruction. For although our Church do, as indeed she ought, indulge the free use of the whole book of God to all her children, and as liberally impart it to them in the course of daily lessons throughout the year; yet, since these passages are singled out for such times as are supposed to draw the greatest numbers together, this, methinks, is a fair intimation, and fit to be taken by the generality of people, that such portions of the Bible are not only of singular profit, when rightly understood, but that they are likewise best suited to the capacities of common men, and consequently, if attended to with diligence and honesty, in less danger of being misunderstood.

It is in order to render these public provisions more effectual, and to assist men in the most essential and useful parts of religion, that the following treatise hath been composed and published. A work indeed originally intended for the more particular service of an excellent young prince; the prudent methods of whose education, though they were far from needing any helps from so much meaner hands, yet did they not make the zeal of offering them cease to be a tribute due to his high station from every lover of this Church and Country. God saw him quickly ripe for heaven, and hath actually placed upon his head a brighter and more durable crown than that which awaited him in reversion here below. To his infinite advantage, it is certain; though to the sad disappointment of those glorious prospects which fed our hopes of

his future greatness, and our happiness in it. For what indeed might we not be allowed to promise ourselves of wisdom and virtue and goodness, and every qualification proper to a princely and a Christian mind, from a genius so noble, a capacity so large, attainments so far above his tender age, and, to say all in a word, from the son of such parents?

But God is wise and just in all his counsels; and blessed be his mercy, which hath preserved to us that royal mother; to the number of whose years we hope he will please to add the proportion wanting in the natural course of her son's. Nor must we forget to be truly thankful for the very valuable blessing of a Protestant succession to our posterity, when those years—shall, as alas! at length they must fail. So that our excellent Church hath still all the security that human appearances can give of a firm and lasting establishment. The only dangers that seem to threaten us arise from our wickedness and our divisions. The former would be effectually prevented by improving those advantages to devotion and piety, and all manner of virtue, which it is the design of this treatise to shew are in great plenty put into our hands. The latter would be in good measure healed, would our brethren of different persuasions lay aside their unreasonable prejudices so far as to acquaint themselves thoroughly with the true Christian spirit, the wisdom, the usefulness, the seasonableness of our public offices. To both which ends, so far as my present concern reaches, somewhat, I am apt to believe, the following discourses may contribute, if allowed so much place in the more retired devotions of the family or the closet, that each of them be made the subject of private consideration on the respective days of their being publicly read in our churches. This method would always employ our thoughts with safety and edification, and upon all solemn occasions will suggest such things to our minds as are sure to be seasonable and proper, and leave good impressions behind.

In pursuance of my design to render this book useful to all, I have endeavoured that it may not be (justly) unacceptable to any. Hence all the modern points of controversy are nowhere industriously enlarged upon. And as oft as the vindication of the Church's honour hath made some little mention of any such necessary, it hath been my constant desire to avoid all offence, by treating them of a different opinion in such a manner as to intend the refuting their errors, but never the reproaching the persons who lie under the unhappiness of being seduced into them.

When I first undertook this work, it was in my mind to have explained particularly the reasons and usages of the several solemn seasons set apart for public devotion ; as also to have given some short account of the remains we have in history concerning those blessed saints whose virtues we at set times commemorate, and of the reasonableness of paying this honour to them. But being in this subject already prevented by the pious labours of a learned and worthy friend^a, I shall contract my thoughts of this kind as occasions offer ; and only hint so much as may be serviceable to the main design of this book : which is the expounding and improving the portions of Scripture recommended to us on those occasions.

I have done, after having advised my reader not to look for any ostentation of nicety or eloquence in the following sheets ; but such a plain and familiar style as might make my arguments most intelligible, and my exhortations grounded upon them most affectionate and moving. For the things I aim at are, becoming an instrument of good in the function God hath called me to ; doing justice to the purest and wisest of Churches ; and, as she in appointing, so I in discoursing upon her Epistles and Gospels, *seek the profit of many, that they may be saved*. With this mind if the reader do likewise take care to peruse them, my end will not fail in good degree to be attained, nor the blessing of God to reward his pains. To whose grace I most heartily recommend these poor unworthy labours, and every one into whose hands they shall come: beseeching Him to be present with all such, and by the inward teachings of his Holy Spirit to prosper whatsoever is contained, and to supply whatsoever is wanting here. That peace and love, decency and order, union and obedience, *truth and justice, religion and piety*, may flourish and abound more and more, to the *advancement of his glory, the good of his Church, the safety, honour, and welfare of our sovereign and her kingdoms* : and especially that the practice of those virtues, and the promotion of such happiness on earth, may bring many souls to that happiness in heaven of which there shall be no end. Amen.

^a Mr. Nelson on the Festivals and Fasts.

A

PARAPHRASE AND COMMENT

UPON ALL THE

EPISTLES AND GOSPELS

USED THROUGHOUT THE YEAR.

THE FIRST SUNDAY IN ADVENT.

THE COLLECT.

ALMIGHTY God, give us grace that we may cast ^aaway the works of darkness, and put upon us the armour of light, now in the time of this mortal life, in which thy Son Jesus Christ came to visit us ^bin great humility; that in the last day, when he shall come again in his ^cglorious Majesty to judge ^dboth the quick and dead, we may ^erise to the life immortal, through him who liveth and reigneth with thee and the Holy Ghost, now and ever. Amen.

THE EPISTLE. Rom. xiii. 8.

8 *Owe no man any thing, but to love one another: for he that loveth another hath fulfilled the law.* 8. Discharge the duties of your respective capacities so faithfully, that nothing be omitted which any relation, natural or civil, requires at your hands; but know, there is still one duty of universal and perpetual obligation; for charity, even when it hath done most, is ever bound and ever labouring to do more: and this is so comprehensive, that it does not only take in the letter, but answers the intent, of the whole moral law.

^a Rom. xiii. 12.^b Phil. ii. 7. Matt. xxi. 5.^c Luke xxi. 27.^d 2 Tim. iv. 1.^e 1 Thess. iv. 16, 17. John v. 29.

9 *For this, Thou shalt not commit adultery, Thou shalt not kill, Thou shalt not steal, Thou shalt not bear false witness, Thou shalt not covet; and if there be any other commandment, it is briefly comprehended in this saying, namely, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.*

10 *Love worketh no ill to his neighbour, therefore love is the fulfilling of the law.* so indeed is the first too, in regard the Christian's love of his neighbour is inseparable from and founded upon the love of God.

11 *And that, knowing the time, that now it is high time to awake out of sleep: for now is our salvation nearer than when we believed.*

which arises from the consideration of the condition of Christians calls for higher degrees of goodness than either the state of natural religion or the Jewish law. We have a clearer and less distant prospect of eternal happiness than either they had who lived before Christ's coming, or than we ourselves had at our first conversion to the faith.

12 *The night is far spent, the day is at hand: let us therefore cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armour of light.*

in proportion as our hopes advance toward enjoyment. Darkness and ignorance are almost quite dispelled by the light of the Gospel. Our life of sin and error wears away apace, and a state of glory and perfection is approaching with speed towards us. Those scandalous vices must therefore be abandoned which will not endure the light, and those virtues acquired and exercised which may be at once a defence against temptations and an ornament to our profession.

13 *Let us walk honestly, as in the day; not in rioting and drunkenness, not in chambering and wantonness, not in strife and envying.*

malicious contentions, are things that affect scoresy, and are attended with shame. They cannot consist with any due regard to modesty and decency, and all who commit are industrious to conceal them.

14 *But put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts thereof.*

baptism engage most solemnly to make the purity of Jesus Christ their constant pattern, and his virtues the garb of their souls, by which they should be 'as visibly distinguished as men commonly are by the garments they wear? It is true indeed, no degree of holiness exempts a man from the necessities of nature, and therefore some

9. For the law designs to prevent all injustice to others; and the loving our neighbour as ourselves does not only imply the doing him no injury, but engage us to do him all the good we can.

10. Thus the second table is effectually satisfied: and the Christian's love of his neighbour is founded upon the love of God.

11. And now to all our other engagements to justice and charity, we shall do well to add that in particular

our present circumstances; higher degrees of goodness than either the state of natural religion or the Jewish law. We have a clearer and less distant prospect of eternal happiness than either they had who lived before Christ's coming, or than we ourselves had at our first conversion to the faith.

12. Every day brings this nearer to us, and it is not fit our zeal should abate, but much rather increase, in

enjoyment. Darkness and ignorance are almost quite dispelled by the light of the Gospel. Our life of sin and error wears away apace, and a state of glory and perfection is approaching with speed towards us. Those scandalous vices must therefore be abandoned which will not endure the light, and those virtues acquired and exercised which may be at once a defence against temptations and an ornament to our profession.

13. Intemperance and revelling, unlawful pleasures and unnatural lusts, uncharitable envyings and malicious contentions, are things that affect scoresy, and are attended with shame. They cannot consist with any due regard to modesty and decency, and all who commit are industrious to conceal them.

14. How then can these be in any degree excusable in Christians, who at their

baptism engage most solemnly to make the purity of Jesus Christ their constant pattern, and his virtues the garb of their souls, by which they should be 'as visibly distinguished as men commonly are by the garments they wear? It is true indeed, no degree of holiness exempts a man from the necessities of nature, and therefore some

provision must be made for these mortal bodies while we carry them about us. But every good man will be careful to restrain this provision to the relief of his wants and the support of his life, without making these a pretence for extending it to the cherishing his lusts, and gratifying the extravagances of a sensual appetite, by vain and luxurious pleasures.

COMMENT.

THE design of this particular season, and of the devotions proper to it, is sufficiently intimated to us by the special collect, to be the reminding men of our blessed Lord's twofold coming: the one already past, when in great humility he came to redeem us; the other still future, when *in his glorious majesty he shall come to judge us.* And the Epistle now under consideration recommends such pious dispositions and practices as are the best qualifications to prepare us both for meeting him with comfort at his second, and for commemorating with due decency and devotion his first advent. I shall therefore endeavour to edify my reader in the virtues proper to these purposes, by proposing from this portion of Scripture,

I. First, the duties which the apostle here urges upon every Christian, and

II. Secondly, the arguments made use of to enforce them.

I. The duties are principally two: charity, and purity of conversation. The former comprehends all that branch of virtue which divines usually distinguish by our *duty to our neighbour*: and this is expressly commanded here. The latter denotes all that which is frequently called our *duty to ourselves*. And this is the importance of those several expressions, *'awaking out of sleep—casting off the works of darkness—putting on the armour of light—walking honestly as in the day, forsaking the vices which are inconsistent with and a dishonour to a Christian's holy profession, 'putting on the Lord Jesus Christ, and not making provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts thereof.*

II. My second head will consist of the motives by which the apostle enforces these duties, and they are likewise two:

1. The consideration of their suitableness to the Gospel state; which, in comparison of the former times of ignorance and error, is as light to darkness, and day to night. And this happy change in our affairs is the effect of our Lord's first coming.

2. The glorious expectations which all good Christians are taught to cherish, of happiness and reward unspeakable to be obtained at their Saviour's second coming, expressed here by *the day and salvation*. And this is thought to be yet farther pressed upon us by representing the shortness of our present life, and the nearer approaches which that bliss every day makes towards us. For in this sense some of the best ^b interpreters understand those words, *Now it is high time to awake out of sleep; for now is our salvation nearer than when we believed. The night is far spent, the day is at hand.*

^c Rom. xiii. 8, 9, 10.

^b Var. 11, 12, 13.

^a Ver. 14.

^k Chrysost. Estius, &c.

The intended brevity of that method I have set myself in this undertaking, will not allow me to enlarge upon each of these particulars, as they very well deserve. And I the rather dispense with myself upon the present occasion, because the matter now before us will be offered to our consideration hereafter; when some things may be spoken to more fully and distinctly, which cannot so conveniently find a room in this discourse. I shall therefore hope my reader will be contented with having several points only proposed to him here, which this exhortation of the apostle suggests to us, and with being referred to those other places where they are like to fall in and be handled more at large; while I confine my thoughts at present to such of them only as are peculiar to the passage now under consideration, and more especially apposite to the design of this season.

To begin then with the first general head, which contains the duties enjoined here by St. Paul. And first of charity, or loving one another.

Now for the setting this matter in its true light, it is very plain these following particulars are fit to be considered:

1. First, the nature of this love, or wherein it properly consists. But because St. Paul hath elsewhere employed a whole chapter upon this matter, I beg leave to remit my reader to that portion of Scripture, and what I shall have to say upon it, when coming under consideration in the course of the Epistles.

2. Secondly, the object of our love, or the persons to whom it ought to extend. Which though the eighth verse here direct us in, and, by making loving *another* and loving our *neighbour* terms equivalent, do imply that no person whatsoever ought to be excluded; yet this extent and the reasons of it will be more conveniently treated of hereafter in the case of the good Samaritan, and the question which gave occasion for that parable.

3. Thirdly, the just measure and degree of this virtue, We must love our neighbour as ourselves. And this also shall be adjusted, when we handle that passage of Scripture last mentioned.

4. Fourthly, the vast comprehension and peculiar excellence of this love; declared here, in that it is said to be the substance and sum and fulfilling of the law. Our Lord says, *"On these two commandments, viz. the love of God and that of our neighbour, hang all the law and the prophets: whereas St. Paul says here of the love of our neighbour alone, that it is the fulfilling of the law. And again, All the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself."*

Now, for a right understanding of this matter, there is not, I conceive, any occasion for attributing to that word *another* a signification so extensive as should include God and our neighbour both. But I rather choose to take the apostle's meaning in one of these two senses:

1. Either, first, that by *the law* here, he intends the second table only; so limiting this term to the subject-matter of his present discourse—the duty to our neighbour. The several precepts whereof are contained in this chapter; five of them specified ver. 9, and the other, which answers to the fifth commandment, insisted on from ver. 1st to the 8th. And thus the character he gives us will import thus much; that all the branches of men's duty to each other are reducible to, summed up in, and discharged by the observance of that one general, that most compendious rule, *Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself*.

2. Or, secondly, including the duty we owe to God, it may very truly be said that the first as well as the second table is comprised in this precept, because the love of our neighbour supposes the love of God as a necessary predisposition. It proceeds upon and springs out of this as its proper foundation and root. For true Christian charity is not that sort of affection which owes its birth to partiality, or passion, or any selfish and worldly considerations: it is not the result of interest, or nearness of blood, or gratitude for good offices, or the like. These may draw the knot closer, and are allowed to make some difference in our regards and behaviour between one man and another. But that which ties the knot at first, and renders the obligation indispensable and universal, is a motive as extensive as the object of this love itself. A principle of religion, a respect to that image of God in which every man resembles his Maker, a concern and tenderness for which we have that God our pattern, who loves all that are thus allied to him. And therefore no man does, no man can, love his neighbour as a Christian, who does not first love God, and then his neighbour upon God's account.

This matter may possibly receive some illustration from that passage of Hosen alleged by our Lord in vindication of some acts of humanity and compassion, for which the Pharisees calumniated him and his disciples. *Go ye, says he, and learn what that meaneth, I will have mercy, and not sacrifice.* And again, *If ye had known what this meaneth, I will have mercy, and not sacrifice, ye would not have condemned the guiltless.* By *mercy, and not sacrifice*, is meant, according to the Hebrew idiom, mercy rather than sacrifice. The former denotes all those good offices which conduce to the comfort and relief of mankind; the latter, all those religious observances, whereby we express our honour and reverence for Almighty God. So that the opposition here does not lie between the moral and the ceremonial part of the law; no, nor properly between our duty to God and that to our neighbour; but the true importance of those words I apprehend to be this: that God, having commanded us to love and serve him, and having appointed instances and acts of different kinds whereby this should be done, is content upon some occasions to seem to wave his privilege. When matters therefore so fall out that we cannot attend to mercy and sacrifice both, he prefers works of charity

before those of piety strictly so called; and had much rather we should testify our love to him by acts of kindness done for his sake to our brethren, whose necessities call for our help, and who may be the better for them, than that we should neglect these, and employ ourselves in the most solemn acts of worship, which immediately regard and terminate entirely in God himself, who neither stands in need of, nor can receive any real advantage from them. Mercy then and sacrifice are only two different methods of expressing one and the same love of God, and he esteems himself loved best and most acceptably when we love our neighbour for his sake.

But to enter a little deeper into this matter. Nothing can possibly be the object of our love but good, and all goodness is in and from God. He is the common source from whence it is derived, and where it resides in its utmost perfection. Our neighbours have a right to our love by virtue of those communications of goodness which God out of his own fulness hath made to them: these are the next and sensible objects, but God is the principal and ultimate one, of our religious affection. This is but one and the same habit in our souls, though the acts by which and the persons towards whom it is exercised be diversified as fit occasions offer themselves. Thus our neighbour is considered as a limited and subordinate and derivative, but God as the sole, infinite, supreme, and original good. The principle then and foundation of love is the same in both cases, but the measures and the motives of it are thus far different, that our neighbour is to be loved for God's sake, and God for his own sake. Consequently, *he that loves another* fulfils the law in its most comprehensive sense, because the second table can only be discharged by that principle which secures our obedience to the first. And as St. John declares that man to be *a liar*, who professes to *love God*, and yet *loves not his brother*, so may we most assuredly depend upon the reverse of that sentence, and affirm, that no Christian truly loves his brother, who does not love God. The former pretence implies the absurdity of a cause without its necessary and inseparable effect; the latter supposes an effect subsisting without that cause which alone is sufficient to produce it.

5. The fifth and last thing to be taken notice of here is the manner of St. Paul's expressing our obligation to this duty; which he hath done in those very significant terms, *Owe no man any thing, but to love one another*. He had commanded us to *render to all their dues*; and, with regard to all the engagements which men's circumstances in the world make them any way debtors to, he says here again, *Owe no man any thing*. But then he proceeds to distinguish between the law of justice and that of charity, by representing the former as a debt which may be so discharged that we shall owe no more: the tributes, the customs, the fear, the honour enjoined in the foregoing verses, may be paid clear off; but this latter of love, it seems, cannot be so satisfied that there shall rest nothing due at the foot of the account.

This is a very material circumstance, and the reasons of it may in some measure appear to us from the following considerations :

1. First, the law of justice and that of charity differ in the end which each of them is designed to serve. The things which justice hath in view are, peace and quiet, order and decency, and good government: to the promoting and securing of these, the wisdom of God and good men have suited those duties and observances, which constitute the body of natural and positive laws relating to this matter. But the end of charity is the general benefit of all mankind; and this law takes in every action that can any way conduce to the happiness of every individual person. Supposing then our diligence never so great in promoting this design hitherto, yet as oft as any new opportunities are offered of contributing to any man's good hereafter, so often there arises a fresh obligation to do our utmost towards it.

2. Secondly, the measures of justice are to be taken from the particular acts enjoined, and the several relations wherein men stand to one another; and when those acts are done as the law directs, the person is liable to no further demands. These acts again vary as men differ in their respective stations. Some are peculiar to parents and governors and superiors; others to children and subjects and inferiors: so that every man's task is set out, and the duties of one capacity are plainly distinguished from those of another. But charity does not confine itself to any condition; it takes in a larger compass, and considers men not under such or such circumstances, but in general as men. This duty is common to all, and cannot be limited like the former, because it can never so happen but that in some kind or other every man living is capable of being beneficial to some, nay, to every other man. For they whose hands are shortest, may yet have hearts as large as the greatest monarch upon earth; and the most mean and indigent condition cannot deprive us of the power, by prayers and hearty good wishes at least, to extend our charity all the world over.

3. Thirdly, the Scriptures, those of the New Testament especially, have urged this duty of love upon us from such topics as plainly shew that it is a debt never to be completely satisfied. Such, in particular, are the examples of God the Father, whose mercies are over all his works; and the amazing kindness of God the Son, who by doing and suffering so great things for us, hath put it past our ability to discharge that obligation perfectly of "*loving one another as he hath loved us*." And yet so it hath pleased God to dispose our affairs, that though the utmost we can do fall infinitely short of a just requital, yet every day furnishes fit occasions of making some sort of return for this unparalleled bounty and love. The world will alway abound with evil and unjust men, and consequently we can never want opportunities of forgiving them that injure, and loving them that hate us; that is, of writing after the copy of his marvellous compassion, who *"makes his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the*

just and on the unjust; but especially of approving ourselves his children and disciples, who in this commended his love towards us, that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us. There will ever be distressed and necessitous objects to bestow our charity upon. And these our blessed Redeemer hath appointed his deputies and receivers; *“Inasmuch as ye did it to the least of these my brethren, ye did it unto me.* We ought therefore to look upon it as a signal blessing, that *“the poor we have always with us, and whosoever we will we may do them good; that we can feed and clothe hungry and naked Christ in his suffering members; that the wisdom and goodness of Providence make the wants of some minister occasion to the virtue of others; that God accepts our kindness to our brethren as payments to himself; nay, not as payments only, but as a transferring the obligation, and rendering him our debtor, for a very small part of that which we owe, and cannot pay at all to him immediately, and in his own proper person.*

4. To all this we may add, fourthly, that the payment of this is not like the discharge of common debts, a burden and a lessening to ourselves, but so suited to our nature, so full of substantial and solid satisfaction, so many ways recommended and made agreeable to us, that the more good we do, the more we feel ourselves still disposed to do; and no part of what the greediest man retains yields half the enjoyment, the sweet complacency, the true gain, which the liberal man finds in what he expends for the benefit of others. The ability and the disposition to do good are each of them a particular blessing, a grace and talent which God intrusts us with; and these, like all other graces, oblige us to thankfulness for them. But our Lord never esteems us truly thankful, except when we use and improve his gifts to the purposes they properly serve. So that every opportunity for acts of kindness should quicken us in the exercise of them; and lays a fresh engagement upon us to be more zealous, more munificent, in proportion as we find our power increase and our hearts enlarged by those blessings, and that charity, which are poured upon us from above.

5. Fifthly, the difference between this and other debts is remarkable upon the account of the different dispositions of the persons obliged by it. Not satisfying the debts we contract in common trading proceeds from injustice, and a sordid or negligent temper, and is therefore scandalous and dishonourable. But it is a mark by which great and truly generous minds are distinguished, never to think they have done good enough, but greedily to embrace every fresh occasion, and think themselves bound still to be more and more beneficial. And the supposing we have fully satisfied our obligations of this kind argues the same narrowness of spirit which tempts us not to satisfy all others.

Upon all these accounts the apostle seems to have had great reason for distinguishing this debt of love from all other debts, as that which alone is universal and perpetual; so far from being overpaid, that

though we are always paying, yet there will be always somewhat resting due. And here I should think myself at liberty to dismiss the first of those duties recommended in this Epistle, were it not expedient to remove one scruple, which some very well-disposed readers may be apt to fall into, from the latter part of my discourse upon it.

For, if the obligation to charity be so unlimited, so much superior to any other, and such as we can never exceed in; if the person whose debtors we are, and whose example is our rule and guide in this matter, have been pleased to interpret and accept the good offices done to his needy members upon earth as done to himself, will it not then become us, like honest debtors, to strip ourselves of all, that so we may go as far as ever we can towards the discharge of this engagement? Ought not a convenient subsistence, and the provision for our families, and those other considerations which are usually thought reasonable to prescribe measures to our liberality, to be all set aside, that we may expend our whole substance upon so good an account as that of making payment to Christ in his afflicted representatives? This is an objection, which though it may deserve to be more distinctly considered, yet I shall mention two or three things at present, sufficient (I hope) to set my reader at ease from any unnecessary perplexities with regard to it.

Now, first, it must be remembered, that charity always presupposes justice; and consequently, no pretence of liberality or mercy can make it lawful to defraud those, in whom the laws of nature or civil society have vested a right to what would be thus distributed. God, under the old law, would not accept that which was stolen in sacrifice; and our Lord, in the ^b gospel, upbraids the Pharisees with hypocrisy and barbarity, for neglecting to sustain their parents, and thinking to justify such undutiful treatment, by devoting that wealth to God which should have relieved their distresses. Now the same rule holds in proportion to other relations; and where these have an antecedent claim, to expose them to want by supplying the wants of others, is not bounty, but robbery and unnatural injustice. We must observe the method in which the apostle proceeds here; first to *render to all their dues*, and then to dispose of the remainder as religion and prudence shall direct. Luxury and vanity should be no bar to our charity; but till we have satisfied the duty of our respective capacities, we are not yet in a condition of *owing no man any thing*, and therefore not at liberty to transfer those provisions to the use of the poor, for which our own flesh and blood may make a reasonable and just demand upon us. From hence we may infer,

Secondly, this obligation to love can be unlimited only with regard to the inward disposition, but cannot possibly be so with regard to the outward acts of charity: these must needs be bounded by our circumstances in the world, by the relations in which we stand, by the very former acts of this kind, each of which leaves less in our power than we had before. But though no man's abilities can extend to all

that want, yet every man may sincerely and earnestly wish the succours he cannot give; and the sincerity of those desires he may approve by doing all the good he can, and by praying for and promoting that which in his own person he cannot effect. Thus his love may and ought to be unbounded; and in this temper of the mind it is that the essence of charity truly consists. The apostle, we see, supposes it possible that a man should give *all his goods to feed the poor*, and yet not *have charity*; and therefore it is neither the act of giving, nor the quantity of the gift, but the principle from whence it proceeds, which recommends it to God's acceptance. And our blessed Saviour, in preferring the *widow's two mites* before the very magnificent contributions of many wealthy persons, hath taught us plainly, that God will judge us by the intenseness of our love, and that this will be measured by that proportion which our liberality bears to our several abilities and circumstances in the world. But then it is true again,

Thirdly, that there is another branch of this love, in which not only the disposition, but the act itself, ought to know no bounds; that, I mean, of bearing and forgiving injuries. No man is allowed to set such measures to himself as these: 'So many wrongs I will pardon, and no more; so long I will continue my love, and then let loose the reins to hatred and revenge;' for here our blessed Master's rule takes place, *'I say unto you, not until seven times, but until seventy times seven.'* Our greatest crimes, and such as we daily repeat, do not weary out the mercy of God, though each of these deserve speedy and eternal vengeance. And therefore the most heinous provocations from our brethren ought not to extinguish our charity, or make us cease both to forgive ourselves, and heartily to pray that God would forgive, even our most unreasonable, even our most implacable enemies. And thus much, I think, may suffice at present, concerning the first duty commanded here, and the apostle's peculiar manner of expressing it in those words, *Once no man any thing, but to love one another.*

II. I proceed now to the second thing urged upon us in this exhortation, viz. purity of heart and life. To which I shall at present say only so much as results from the explanation of those figurative terms by which the apostle hath recommended it to us. And they are four:

1. *'Awaking out of sleep.'*
2. *'Casting off the works of darkness, and putting on the armour of light.'*
3. *'Walking honestly, as in the day, and avoiding those vices which are manifestly here implied to be attended with indecency and shame.'*
4. *'Putting on the Lord Jesus Christ, and (in agreement with, or as a necessary consequence of this) not making provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts thereof.'*

^c 1 Cor. xiii. 3.

^d Mark xii. 43, 44.

^e Matth. xviii. 22.

^f Ver. 11.

^g Ver. 12.

^h Ver. 13.

ⁱ Ver. 14.

1. The first of these metaphors compares a life of sensuality and sin to *sleep*; and the abandoning such a dissolute conversation, to *men's awaking out of that sleep*. And this I might make appear to be a very proper resemblance upon many accounts, more particularly these three that follow:

1. As sleep is a condition of blindness and great delusion. It entertains us with dark and confused and inconsistent images of things, which, when our waking thoughts reflect upon, we find to have nothing in them but falsehood and deceit. Thus the sensual man, who feeds and is governed by his passions, lives as it were in one continued dream; he flatters himself with wild and empty notions of things, esteems those vanities and excesses to be the perfection and happiness, which are in very deed the blemish and misery of human nature; and all his fancied satisfactions are so far from yielding any true enjoyment, that after the utmost industry to indulge them, they leave him at last under that wretched disappointment described by the prophet Isaiah, *as when an hungry man dreameth, and, behold, he eateth; but he awaketh, and his soul is empty: or as when a thirsty man dreameth, and, behold, he drinketh; but he awaketh, and, behold, he is faint, and his soul hath appetite*. So is it with all who make the gratification of their sensual affections the end and business of life. They pursue after something, which for a little while works strongly upon their imaginations, soothes and tickles them with a false and treacherous delight; but when their eyes are opened, and they awaken into serious and composed thought, the airy idea vanishes immediately, and the persons who supposed themselves possessed of most, upon a just computation find *nothing in their hands*.

2. As sleep is a state of negligence and inactivity. Necessary indeed this is for the recruit of these frail and feeble bodies of ours, which cannot bear continued labour and thought without some intervals of rest and frequent suspensions of our noblest powers. But it is the animal life only which receives benefit by such intermissions. To the rational all that time is lost, and the man (properly speaking) is dead to the best and true purposes of living. So likewise sensual pleasures administer to the meaner and brutal part of the soul, our appetites and affections; but reason and religion are so far from receiving any improvement, that they are manifestly impaired by our studious gratifications of, and vehement pursuits after them. If these pleasures be of a sinful kind, they manifestly *war against the soul*; and if they be innocent in their kind, but immoderate in their degree, they bring upon us a fatal habit of spiritual drowsiness, make us unthinking and heavy in our duty, dull to good impressions, and unfit for vigorous improvements. Like those drones who sleep, not for refreshment, but wantonness and sloth, we make the vacant spaces of life so many and so large, that all our good dispositions languish and grow cold upon our hands. The things that are temporal and present, when too long dwelt upon, will render us of course regardless and insensible

of distant and spiritual, and leave us at last as little inclination as leisure, for the discharge of that great work which God sent us into the world about.

3. The pertinence of this comparison appears yet farther, in regard that sleep is a state liable to great danger and surprise; such as enemies and robbers take advantage of, because we are then least of all in a condition to discover or prevent their attempts upon us. And this is evidently the case of a sensual life. It lulls and stupifies men with a false security; keeps them in ignorance of the infinite perils which beset them on every side; and doth not only expose them to assaults, but even assist the adversary against them. For those very affections, which such persons are at so much pains to gratify and cherish, are the engines and instruments employed in the destruction of souls. Every indulgence of these, beyond due measure, is like drawing a sword, and turning the point of it upon one's own self. And they who do so, instead of standing upon their guard, march directly up to the mouth of the loaded cannon, help to lay the ambuscade, and turn their own tempters.

Now a life of sobriety and severe virtue, such as the gospel prescribes and the apostle here recommends, is on the other hand very fitly represented by *waking out of sleep*.

1. As it opens men's eyes, disabuses them of their errors, teaches them to pass a right judgment, and to make a just computation of things; inspires them with a generous disdain of sordid and brutish, and puts them upon seeking every way manly pleasures, such as are substantial and durable, spiritual and satisfactory, answerable to the dignity, and proportioned to the desires of a reasonable and immortal soul.

2. As it rouses men to action, and suffers them not to loiter away their precious hours in idle and unprofitable living, but fires them with a vigorous zeal of doing good, of answering their character, and dispatching their Master's business with diligence and cheerfulness.

3. As it gives them due apprehensions of their danger, and keeps a strict guard against the malice and cunning of an enemy, who they are sensible lies in wait continually to destroy them. These wakeful men, as oft as the cares or diversions of this life dispose them to slumber, consider that death and danger are ever at hand, and sleep in their arms. Their appetites and passions, I mean, are contained in strict discipline, and their very first motions are nicely observed and timely subdued. They know the difficulties of the way, and take every step with a wariness becoming men who travel in the midst of snares and precipices. And thus they awake out of the blindness and delusion, the negligence and inactivity, and are provided against the hazards and surprises of this spiritual sleep.

2. The second figure by which this purity of life is expressed, we have (ver. 12.) in *casting off the works of darkness, and putting on the armour of light*. By darkness here may be meant either ignorance or privacy; and consequently the works of it will import, either such, as no man in his senses would be guilty of, did he rightly understand the

natural turpitude which is in them; or else such, as they who do commit, are so far ashamed of as to affect secrecy, and by all possible means labour to conceal them from the eye of the world. Night and shades, and the privatest corners, are sought as the only proper scenes for facts which carry their own condemnation along with them, and brand the actor with infamy; who therefore would not be seen, because conscious to himself that, if seen, he must of course be disapproved and despised and detested. These, then, Christians must throw aside and leave off, like those tattered or sullied garments, in which it would be a reproach to see company: and in their stead such habits must be put on as are fit to appear in broad day, such as will bear the nicest observation, and make them shine as lights in the world. And as their comeliness justifies the title of *light*, so are they very properly termed *armour* too: for these dispositions and habits fortify the mind, and repel the darts of the spiritual enemy. There being no better preservative against temptations than that of being well employed, and a strict regard to the decency of every thing we do. And these good habits are once more said to be *put on*, with allusion to our common clothing; intimating that, as no part of the body is left naked, which would either be offensive and unseemly to the sight, or suffer by being exposed to the weather; so no part of the soul should be destitute of the virtues proper for it, no graces wanting which may contribute either to its ornament or its defence.

3. Another expression of like importance we have in those words, (ver. 13.) *Let us walk honestly, as in the day*. In opposition whereunto are those several vices, specified in the following part of the verse, which draw upon men the scandal and scorn of all that behold them. And this metaphor is likewise taken from the care men usually take to recommend themselves to the esteem of others by a garb clean and decent, and suitable to their quality. Now, since the sight and observation of others is the argument insisted upon here, Christians must be careful to take this in its just extent. In deference to men, a sordid or too negligent outside is all we are solicitous to avoid, because their observation can go no farther than the outward appearance. But the same reason obliges Christians, in clothing their souls, to consider whose inspection they are under in this regard; not only that of their brethren, who may be imposed upon with artificial disguises, but that of saints and "angels, and especially of Christ and God himself; one, whose eyes are in every place, to whom our very hearts are open, and from whom no secrets are hid. So that this argument leaves no room for hypocrisy, no covert for the private things of dishonesty; but requires purity in our very thoughts and intentions, because even these are as visible to God's all-seeing eye as any the most public indecencies of our garb and behaviour are to the observation and censure of men. And, as the respect due to those spectators is greater far than that we owe to any of the same nature with ourselves, though never so much above us in quality and worldly distinctions, so are we always

to remember that, in regard of God, we act as it were upon a common theatre, and ought no more to be guilty of the least evil or indecency, even in imagination or desire, than if we stood before the severest judges, and did it in the presence of all mankind.

Now the vicious practices mentioned here are all of them such as tend to the dishonour and detriment of men, and are utterly inconsistent with the dignity and character of Christians. Such are the revellings and excesses, the rioting and drunkenness, of which this apostle says elsewhere, *they that be drunken are drunken in the night; but let us, who are of the day, be sober.* Such the chambering and wantonness, the lewdness and bestialities of the heathen, so far self-condemned, even among them, as to endeavour their own concealment. But for Christians *Pit is a shame*, he says, for such *even to speak of those things which were done of them in secret.* Such again the strife and envying so directly opposite to that universal kindness and peace which our blessed Master hath made the badge and livery, as it were, of all who retain to him: for *by this*, says he, *shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye hate love one to another;* and accordingly we are told, *he that hateth his brother is still in darkness, and walketh in darkness.* And we cannot wonder that these sins of bitterness and discord are here added to those of luxury and lewdness, when it is considered how naturally hatred and contention spring from the hearts of excess; and that the moderating men's sensual appetites and passions were certainly the most effectual course to preserve amity and good order in the world. The most furious quarrels and heart-burnings, whether public or private, are not about the necessary supports of life, but for those superfluities which feed our lusts and our pride, and minister to pomp and extravagance. And therefore in opposition to those scandalous qualities, which, like filth and rags, disparage and disfigure a Christian, we are commanded in the

4. Fourth and last place, to *put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and not make provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts thereof.* Whether this metaphor of *putting on Christ* allude to our clothing in general, or whether more particularly to that emblem of innocence, the white robe formerly used to be put on at baptism, is no very material inquiry. The design of it is manifestly this: instead of those vicious habits, which are a deformity to Christians and a dishonour to their profession, to recommend such ornaments as suit with our condition, and will not fail to procure us respect from those with whom we converse. And the expression imports that Christ should be our pattern; that his sobriety and gravity, his meekness and moderation, and great charity, and all the virtues and graces so conspicuous in him, should be (if I may so say) the things in fashion with all his followers; that they who are out of this mode make a very awkward and ridiculous figure, such as derives disgrace and contempt upon them. And that these excellencies in Christ should be as familiar to us, as inseparable

o 1 Thess. v. 7, 8.

p Ephes. v. 12.

q John xiii. 35.

r 1 John ii. 12.

s Gal. iii. 27.

from us, as evident a distinction of our quality, as the apparel we constantly wear is to our bodies. Particularly, that we should let this world and its affairs and delights sit as loose about us as may be, by imitating his abstemious life, and making a difference between the supplies necessary for the subsistence of our outward man, and the superfluous vanities which heighten its appetites, inflame its passions, and indulge it in luxury and sin. Some provision we may, nay, we ought to make for the flesh; such as may preserve it in the condition God hath set it in, as a servant and instrument to the spirit; such as may render it fit for duty, and preserve it in obedience to the higher and commanding part of us. But as our Creator hath appointed the body in a state of subordination to the soul, so all the comforts and delights of it should aim, not at enjoyment, but use; and be directed to the benefit of that better part, of which the man and the happiness of his nature principally consists. And this is a caution highly seasonable and pertinent to the apostle's design, in regard that all the vices mentioned before, and whatsoever else is either a blemish or an obstruction to the spiritual and divine life, proceed from an undue preference of the bodily and fleshly part, and making the gratifications of, and care for that, the main end and measure of our actions.

II. I have now at length done with the duties enjoined, and pass to my second general head, the motives made use of here to enforce them, which are contained in those words, *And that, knowing the time, that now it is high time to awake out of sleep; for now is our salvation nearer than when we believed. The night is far spent, the day is at hand.* These passages admit of a twofold interpretation, each of which furnishes an argument very pertinent to the apostle's purpose.

1. For first, some by *the night and the day* understand the darkness of the times before, and the light of those under the gospel; and these, by *salvation being nearer than when they believed*, do suppose St. Paul to mean the advantages which these Romans, who acknowledged a Messiah already come, now enjoyed above what belonged to them while only expecting the promised Messiah yet to come.

The force of the argument, taken in this sense, lies here; that it highly concerns men to consider the blessings of a clearer revelation, and the profit God expects they should make of it: that they are obliged to improve in holiness proportionably to the means and opportunities of living better put into our hands: that after so full instructions and so bright an example, as those of the holy and merciful Jesus, it would be a most indecent, a most inexcusable absurdity, if they, who are called his disciples, and profess to tread in his steps, should abandon themselves to the works of malice and shame, and be so far from the signal virtues which Christians ought to be distinguished by, as even to lose the bowels and the modesty of common men. Thus the consideration of our Lord's first advent, the doctrines he taught, and the copy he hath set us, serve the design of this exhortation very well; but for any farther enlargement upon this

construction of the words, I must refer my reader to ^aanother place, and at present satisfy myself with representing the arguments contained in them, when interpreted of our Lord's second coming. For,

2. Every reader of the New Testament must needs have observed the frequent mention made there of one day, eminent and remarkable above all the rest; one, styled upon this account, by way of particular designation, ^y*the day*—^z*that day*; called elsewhere ^a*the day of the Son of man*—^b*the day of the Lord Jesus Christ*—^c*the day of God*—^d*the day of restitution*, or final consummation of all things—^e*the day of judgment*; and distinguished by many other titles, which denote that in that day the glory of Christ shall shine forth in its full lustre; that a perfect discrimination shall then be made between the good and bad, and every man receive an eternal recompense according to the things done in his body. This day many expositors understand here as represented still future, by that expression of being *at hand*; whereas the day of gospel light and Christ's first advent was already come upon these Romans, and could not so properly be described as yet approaching. Thus the *night* here will answer to the present life, a state of wandering and weakness and great imperfection; and *'the salvation'* will import that bliss which the faithful expect and depend upon when that righteous judge shall save all them who persevere in good works, and live and die in his fear.

Now admitting the ignorance and general depravation of former ages to be well resembled by the darkness of *the night*, and the perfection of good men in the next world by the bright shine of *the day*, we may discern a middle state of things, answerable to the springing of the morning and the rising of the sun. A dawn, sufficient to guide our feet into the way of happiness and peace, though infinitely short of the comforts and glories of that blessed noon, when all the clouds of sin and infirmity shall be scattered, and we shall see and be like that God, who is *light* so pure, that *in him is no darkness at all*. Thus we may see good reason why *the night* should under this gospel-state be represented as *far spent*, but not absolutely done away, and *the day* said to be *at hand*, though not come in its full strength. Because frail mortality will always have some remains of shadow and dusk; the brightest virtue and the clearest knowledge stopping vastly short of that perfection of both, which will break upon wise and good men hereafter, at the resurrection of the just.

This day is very differently described, according to the different condition of the persons to be concerned in it. ^hWith regard to the wicked, in circumstances full of terror, as that which shall *discover the hidden things of dishonesty, bring the secrets of all hearts* into judgment, and pour upon such the wrath and vengeance of a provoked, and then implacable God. To the righteous, as a day which shall

^a See Epist. for Rhiph. ^y Heb. x. 25. ^z 2 Tim. iv. 8. ^a Luke xvii. 24.
^b 1 Cor. v. 5. 2 Thess. v. 2. Phil. ii. 16. ^c 2 Pet. iii. 12. ^d Acts iii. 12.
^e Matt. xii. 36. 2 Pet. ii. 9. ^f Ver. 11. ^e 1 John i. 5. ^h 1 Cor. iv. 5.
Rom. ii. 16. ii. 5. Rev. vi. 17. Matt. vii. 23. xxv. 34, &c. 2 Tim. iv. 8. Rom. viii. 23.
Luke xxi. 28. 1 Cor. xiii. 12. xv. 53, 54. 1 John iii. 2.

manifest their good deeds to all the world, crown them with public praise and everlasting bliss, accomplish their redemption, abundantly compensate their past sufferings, answer and exceed their largest hopes, and confer upon them that indefectible holiness and wisdom, which they so eagerly pant, so zealously aspire after, in the mean while.

This latter, and more comfortable part of the argument, is what the apostle insists upon in the passage now before us. The rather, probably, that he might soften the persecutions and afflictions which Christians then lay under, by the prospect of so glorious a recompense, and by putting them in mind, that they were every day and hour advancing nearer to the end of their troubles, and to that salvation, in which they were taught to place their all, their only happiness. Thus wisely providing against that too common weakness, even in people of sincere and good intentions, who often set out at first with warmth and vigour and vehement desires, but are apt in process of time to cool and languish, and grow remiss, or weary of well-doing. Here then he hints the folly and the sin of slackening our endeavour, when, like racers, we ought rather to quicken our pace, and to exert ourselves more and more, in proportion as we draw toward the goal. For the prize is given to none who do not come up thither; we must finish, as well as begin well; and perseverance is the only thing which can secure all our past labour, though never so commendable hitherto, from being at last *in vain in the Lord*.

And what can be a more effectual spur to the virtues recommended here, than the consideration of such a day? If any thing have the power to enlarge our hearts, and open our hands, in entire affection and unbounded charity, surely this reflection must do it, that these dispositions and acts of beneficence are the very marks which shall then distinguish the *sheep* from the *goats*. If any thing prevail for the effectual mortification of our brutal appetites and passions, the excellence of this salvation sure will quicken and confirm this good resolution in us. If any thing support us under the afflictions of the world and the difficulties of religion, it is the nearer approach of that blissful reward, which if rightly estimated would *make us more than conquerors*. Much weaker arguments than these are successful with them who strive for a corruptible crown; and what stupid wretches are we, if we faint and give out, notwithstanding encouragements infinitely greater, when striving for a crown incorruptible! We, I say, whose gain is inestimable, whose conflict is but short, and whose day (in respect of death at least, which will determine the eternal state of every man's soul) may, without a figure, be most truly said to be *at hand*, and even at the door. Shake off then, my brethren, shake off your sloth from this very moment; awake, for it is high time that we should all awake to righteousness. Let us up and be doing every one of us; and so remember that condescension of our Lord, *when he came to visit us in great humility, that our loins may be girt, our lights*

¹ Matt. xxv. 34, &c.

² 1 Cor. ix. 25.

³ Luke xii. 35. ⁴ 1 Pet. i. 13.

burning, and our lamps trimmed; that is, our souls adorned with all those graces and good works, which may prepare and fit us to meet this great King decently, when he shall come to judge us in his glorious majesty. So shall we rise to the life immortal, and, being found such as had put on the Lord Jesus now in the time of this mortal life, shall live and reign with him, who liveth and reigneth with the Almighty Father and the Holy Ghost, now and ever. Amen.

There are some inferences from the foregoing particulars proper to have been added here, but this comment having already exceeded its just bounds, the reader is desired to consult the Epistles and Gospels already noted in the margin.

THE GOSPEL. St. Matt. xxi. 1.^a

1 *When they drew nigh unto Jerusalem, and were come to Bethphage, unto the mount of Olives, then sent Jesus two disciples,*

2 *Saying unto them, Go into the village over against you, and straightway ye shall find an ass tied, and a colt with her: loose them, and bring them unto me.*

3 *And if any man say ought unto you, ye shall say, The Lord hath need of them, and straightway he will send them.*

4 *All this was done, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet, saying,*

5 *Tell ye the daughter of Sion, Behold, thy King cometh unto thee, meek, and sitting upon an ass, and a colt the foal of an ass.*

we find him consulting his case after this manner in much longer travels; but he had other reasons in view, and particularly that, by this approach to the holy city, a prophecy of Zechariah's might be fulfilled in him, which the ancient Jews constantly understood of the Messias. Now this foretells matter of great joy to Jerusalem, upon the account of a King, who should distinguish himself from other princes, by an entry full of humble and most unusual pomp; such as should express the meekness of his mind, and the nature of his dominion.

6 *And the disciples went, and did as Jesus commanded them,*

7 *And brought the ass, and the colt, and put on them their clothes, and they set him thereon.*

these beasts, with their leave they brought them; and instead of riding furniture, made use of their own clothes; and thus Jesus rode.

1, 2, 3. As our Lord one day was passing with his disciples from Bethany towards Jerusalem, shortly after his raising Lazarus from the dead, and five days before the Passover, at which he suffered, when they were as far on their way as Bethphage, and near the foot of the mount of Olives; then, &c.

4, 5. This was not done by Jesus with any design to relieve himself from the toil and weariness of a long journey (for the distance between Jerusalem and Bethany is but small); nor do

7. After having satisfied the owners, who questioned them about their loosing

8 *And a very great multitude spread their garments in the way; others cut down branches from the trees, and strawed them in the way.* 8. Great numbers of the people also assisted at this solemnity; they came out of the city to meet him; they performed such ceremonies of joy and respect, as were customary in public rejoicings; particularly with the Jews at their most splendid feast, that of Tabernacles, and at the inauguration of their kings.

9 *And the multitudes that went before, and that followed, cried, saying, Hosanna to the son of David: Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord; Hosanna in the highest.* 9. In this solemn procession they conducted him to the city, shouting forth acclamations and prayers to God for the prosperity of this long expected King, this promised seed of David. And these they uttered in the prophetic words of David himself, who many ages ago foresaw this kingdom, and whose expressions were so understood to belong to it, as frequently to be inserted into the solemn devotions of those ancient Jews who believed and longed for it.

10 *And when he was come into Jerusalem, all the city was moved, saying, Who is this?* 10. This proceeding filled all the inhabitants of Jerusalem with wonder; to whom the multitudes justified themselves, by acknowledging openly that they paid these honours to that eminent prophet, Jesus. The Pharisees also, moved with envy and indignation at such public respects, would have had Jesus put a stop to them. But he returned such an answer as intimated the people to have been governed by a divine impulse; and then,

11 *And the multitude said, This is Jesus the prophet of Nazareth of Galilee.*

12 *And Jesus went into the temple of God, and cast out all them that sold and bought in the temple, and overthrew the tables of the moneychangers, and the seats of them that sold doves,* 12. Having suffered his kingdom and divine authority to be thus proclaimed by others, he proceeds to exert it himself, by purging the temple (a second time, as he had done at another Passover three years before) of those who kept a public mart there in the court of the Gentiles. This they did for the convenience of selling birds and beasts for sacrifice, and returning money for such as came from distant parts of the country up to this festival.

13 *And said unto them, It is written, My house shall be called the house of prayer; but ye have made it a den of thieves.* 13. These he rebuked, by reminding them of the prophet's words, and so hinting their abuse of that holy place, designed for devotion and God's worship, when turned into a place of traffick and unjust gain; since the profit extorted by fraud and oppression is no better than downright robbery; and the exercise of such trades in a consecrated place was so far from its primitive institution, that it makes their injustice to become sacrilege.

COMMENT.

THE Gospel for this day relates two very remarkable actions of our blessed Saviour :

1. The first, his solemn entry into Jerusalem.
2. The other, his behaviour in the temple there.

The latter of these I shall reserve for that account given of it by St. Luke, which will offer itself to our consideration hereafter, and at present will confine my discourse to the former only. *And here again there would arise several reflections, which I must be content to recommend to the improvement of my reader's private meditation; such as these that follow :

1. The divine knowledge and power of our blessed Lord. †The former, in foretelling where and in what manner his disciples should find the beasts proper for his purpose upon this occasion. The ‡latter, in inclining the hearts of persons at a distance to so ready a compliance with his demands.

2. His meekness and condescension in giving the owners satisfaction, and asking their consent; that so no man's property might so much as seem to be invaded by any order of his; though at the same time he were in the strictest sense what he styles himself, *the Lord*, and had a right antecedent and superior to those very possessors of whom he sent to borrow.

3. The cheerful obedience of these disciples to a command which carnal reasoning might have started many objections against, and which nothing less than a steadfast persuasion that he who sent the message would be sure to give success to it, could have prevailed upon them to execute, as they did, without any demur or delay.

4. The mystical importance of these beasts; the one, an ass inured to burdens and labour; the other, a colt unbroken, *on which never man had sat*. By which we may understand, with some, the Jews, long accustomed to the Mosaical yoke; and the Gentiles, who had hitherto *walked in the imaginations of their own hearts*, and (as St. Paul expresses it) *lived without God in the world*. Or else we may, with others, apply the passage to the rational and the sensible principle in every man's breast. For either way the parallel will hold, that even the rudest and wildest heathens, even the most stubborn and unruly passions, are made teachable and tame, when they submit themselves to Christ. And as his design was to unite all nations in his body; so when his grace and doctrine are our guides, when he sits supreme and rules in all the faculties of our souls, then do our most carnal appetites move aright, and we march triumphantly under his direction into the heavenly Jerusalem.

There is yet another improvement, made by ^wsome, of these disciples

* Gospel for tenth Sunday after Trinity. † Ver. 2. ‡ Ver. 3. § Ver. 3. Mark xi. 5, 6.
 Luke xix. 33, 34. * Luke xix. 30. † Chrysost. tom. 5. Sermon. 140. p. 83. ed. Bion.
 ‡ Ephes. ii. 12. § Justin Mart. in Tryph. p. 271. ed. Paris, 1636. ¶ Catech. ed. Paroch.

loosing the ass and the colt: who take occasion from hence to treat of absolving sinners. But this, and some other inferences upon the place, are so remote from what the literal sense suggests, that I can hardly think them worth the mentioning. And even those already mentioned ought to give place to the three following particulars, which I shall make the subject of my present discourse. Now they are,

I. First, The time of this solemn entry into Jerusalem.

II. Secondly, The circumstances and ceremonies peculiar to it. And

III. Thirdly, The significance of, and the ends served by it.

I. The time of this solemn entry is very punctually fixed by St. John; who acquaints us, that *six days before the Passover* our Lord came to Bethany, and was there entertained at supper; that Lazarus, whom he had lately raised from the dead, dwelt there; and that he sat at meat with him: and afterwards he says, that on the next day (the fifth before the Passover inclusive) *much people came forth to meet him, and took branches of palm trees, and cried Hosanna*; so conducting him into the holy city, with all those demonstrations of joy and respect, described at large in the Gospel for this day. Now herein we may discover a very remarkable mystery, by comparing this action with the old law relating to the Jewish Passover. The first circumstance whereof is, that on the *tenth day of the first month* the paschal lamb should be drawn out from the rest of the flock, in order to be slain the *fourteenth* of the same month. ²Our Lord's approach then to Jerusalem in this unusual manner answers, in point of time, to the separation of the lamb designed for the paschal sacrifice. The gayety and pomp of this approach agrees exactly with the garlands and processions and shouts, and other marks of joy usual (we are told) with the Jewish, and almost all people, in leading their victims to the altar. So then, it was not without particular good reason that our Lord admitted these significant ceremonies at so critical a juncture. For to any, who observe things nicely, they will appear exceeding seasonable and proper for accomplishing those figures and types under the Levitical dispensation, of which he was the intended end and substance. This was the true, the universal, the only effectual ^aPassover, which turned away the wrath of God and his destroying angel; which preserves his people from the dire effects of sin and vengeance, and works a perfect reconciliation by his precious blood for as many as are sprinkled with and washed in it. This Lamb of God did therefore, on the day appointed by Moses, come forth from Bethphage (a ^bvillage belonging to the priests, from whence the beasts reserved for sacrifice were drawn out for the service of the temple); he came forth, a most holy and unblemished sacrifice, with all the cheerful pomp customary upon such occasions, with all the marks of triumph which became so willing, so beneficial, so victorious a death: a death which alone fulfilled what others of this nature could but faintly represent; and at once subdued those hitherto invincible destroyers of mankind, Guilt and Hell and Death. This Lamb might be truly said, from all

^a John xii. 1, 2, 12, 13. ^y Exod. xii. 3, &c. ^z See Ainsw. in Exod. xii. ^s 1 Cor. v. 8.
^b Andrioom. Theatr. Terr. Sanctæ.

these demonstrations of gladness, not so properly to be led, as to offer himself to the slaughter. He had formerly declared, *“No man taketh my life from me, but I lay it down of myself.”* And by these first steps towards his suffering he shewed with what resolution he advanced to his last conflict, with what readiness and cheerfulness of mind he suffered. It is also observed by a learned ^dauthor of our own nation, that the high priest, some days before the solemnity of the yearly atonement, did separate himself from his family and all civil conversation, the better to prepare himself for the sacred offices of that season; and that he was then conducted from his own house to the temple with great pomp: to this our Lord's triumphant entry into the holy city might likewise allude, who, five days before his passion, was thus attended to the temple, before his offering that great sacrifice of himself, which expiated the sins of the whole world.

My second observation regards the circumstances and ceremonies peculiar to this action; in which we shall find somewhat very distinguishing, both as to the persons who contributed to the pomp of it, and as to the manner of the thing itself.

1. The persons are described to have been a *“mixed multitude, consisting of disciples and common people: such as were moved to do thus from the doctrines and miracles which they had heard and seen; and, from a deep and reverent sense of our Lord's divine power, were very forward to pay him what honour they could.”* St. John observes to this purpose the more immediate occasion of their extraordinary respect at this time; *“The people (he says) that was with him, when he called Lazarus out of his grave, and raised him from the dead, bare record. For this cause also the people met him, for that they heard that he had done this miracle.”* So that the qualifications chiefly remarkable in the assistants at this ceremony are not the quality or outward splendour, the wealth or the reputation, the learning or the eminent posts; but the sincerity and honest zeal, the hearty affection to Christ, and the firm persuasion of his being the true Messiah, which the wonderful things he taught and did had wrought in their minds. And these to him, who is no respecter of persons, who came to set up a kingdom not of this world, rendered those tributes of praise and acknowledgment, from men mean and insignificant, as to any temporal respects, more acceptable, more becoming his character, more truly for his honour, than any dissembled or interested homage of rulers or rabbies, the greatest or the wisest of the sanhedrim could have been: for external advantages are of no consideration with God, while they want good dispositions within to recommend them.

2. The manner of this solemnity was likewise very singular. Instead of numerous guards, and triumphal chariots, and costly preparations, we find only the attendance of a vulgar and despised crowd; the person for whom these honours were designed riding in humble poverty upon a borrowed ass, and the way before him not covered with tapestry or rich furniture, but strawed with branches hastily

^c John x. 18.

^d See Selden, lib. iii. de Synedr. c. 11. p. 7. Bp. Patrick on Levit. xvi. 3.

^e Luke xix.

^f John xii.

^g John xii. 17, 18.

out down from trees, and the garments of them who made up the train. The songs and acclamations applied to this occasion did not tell of bloody battles fought, of victories obtained at the expense of infinite toil and treasure, of countries miserably harassed, and reduced by fire and sword; but rehearsed the mercies of God, long expected and now fulfilled, in the peaceful reign of the Messiah. That Son of David, who should turn men's *swords into ploughshares and their spears into pruning hooks*, by establishing such laws, as (if duly observed) would effectually curb and quiet those general disturbers of mankind, Envy and Avarice and Ambition; and would settle the world in profound and perfect tranquillity, upon principles of justice and contentedness, invincible meekness, and mutual love. This therefore was a pomp, in all its parts so distant from those of common princes, that in comparison of them it might look almost like a mock-triumph. And we may truly say, that our Lord's humility never appeared in more distinguishing characters than in this single instance of his seeming to take greatness and state to himself. Accordingly we find an eminent prophecy fulfilled herein, which had some ages before pointed out the Messiah by an approach to the holy city, which had a sort of splendour peculiar to itself. Such as was never paralleled by any other king, such as expressed the lowliness of his mind and the meanness of his worldly circumstances, even while it set forth the royalty of his person. And hence no doubt it is, that St. Matthew took such care to remind the Jews of that memorable prediction. Thus challenging them, as it were, to produce any example of its being duly accomplished, except in the person and by this action of our Jesus. *All this was done*, says he, *that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet, &c.* Which is in effect to argue thus: If Zechariah did (as the Jews confess he did) by the King in that prophecy intend the promised Messiah, then the Messiah must come to Jerusalem in such a manner as answers that description: but Jesus did, and no other person ever did distinguish himself by coming to Jerusalem in this manner: therefore Jesus and no other is the true Messiah, whom that prophet had in view. And thus I am almost unawares got within the compass of my third particular, which is

III. The significance of, and the ends served by, this action. The Evangelist indeed takes express notice of no other end, than the utmost and exact completion, which it was necessary that prophecy should meet with; but I think we may very reasonably conclude that some other purposes of great importance were served by it. Particularly these that follow:

1. These honours were of use to vindicate our Lord's innocence, and to do right to his character, by leaving respectful impressions of him upon men's minds, at a time so critical as this, which immediately preceded the ignominy of his crucifixion. At a former Passover, when the people in admiration of his miracles would have paid him

kingly honours, he withdrew, and refused that unseasonable testimony of their zeal. Partly (as we may probably conjecture) because their eagerness had a mixture of worldly considerations in it; and partly, because the accepting those honours then would have been liable to misinterpretation, and might have obstructed the efficacy of his preaching. But now the course of his prophetic office was finished; now the people proceeded upon other motives, and therefore he offers himself to be treated as became their conviction of his divine power and truth; and (as he afterwards confessed before Pilate, so) he now suffers them publicly to acknowledge and proclaim his royal dignity. And thus he thought fit to do; as for other reasons, so perhaps not least of all for this, that these free and solemn acknowledgments might be for a balance against the shame and scandal of his cross. And an overbalance they will be with judicious and impartial considerers; when it is observed, that his death was the contrivance of a restless party, enraged with envy and malice, obstinately prejudiced by secular interest, and jealous of his growing greatness in the esteem of the people; but that, on the other hand, these pomps and acclamations were the effect of great sincerity, and an honest reverence for one, who, they verily believed, had fully answered all the noble predictions concerning the Messiah; and must of necessity be that very person so long promised, so impatiently expected, so punctually described by the ancient prophets. This opinion and behaviour in the people was the natural effect of Christ's actions and doctrine. The same they would have had upon all who saw and heard them, had all who saw and heard but considered them as these disinterested men did, without the blinding of passion, or the bias of worldly and private respects. Thus it appeared, that all the barbarous indignities put upon Jesus afterwards, did not speak the general sense of the Jewish nation, but only shewed the spite of a governing faction. Nor ought there any great stress to be laid upon the multitudes, which were then drawn into compliance with their superiors. Since the subtle management of men in post and power, and the easiness and servile fears usual in those of a mean depending condition, make such sudden changes not at all surprising. Nor is it new to find even the consciences of the vulgar in perpetual bondage to those great masters, whose tyranny expects to have their very souls at its devotion. And therefore men's judgments and inclinations are never to be known by their behaviour, when any such checks are upon them, but must be measured by what they do (as in the case before us) when at their own disposal; when under no influence from the example of their superiors, nor any apprehensions of displeasure, if they do not follow them to do evil.

2. As this solemn entry was a declaration of Christ's kingdom, so the circumstances peculiar to it were very significant intimations of what nature and quality that kingdom should be. Not one of this world, nor of any affinity to such, whose pomps were so very unlike

* John vi. 15.

† Ch. xxvii. 11. John xviii. 36, 37.

those of earthly princes, that they only who behold them with an eye of faith can discern any thing of splendour and true greatness in them. This inauguration was but a more formal introduction to the death of the king celebrated by it; and the persons and methods and every part in it were (as I said before) so many marks of poverty and humility and meekness, neglect and contempt of the world and its gayeties. This throne was erected in the hearts of men; and its excellence consisted not in the figure or the numbers, but in the virtues and holy dispositions of its subjects. And certainly our blessed Lord could not have taken a more effectual course for refuting and correcting that vain imagination of the Messiah's earthly dominion, at his first coming, than by ordering matters so, that this only instance of his receiving princely honours should be so directly opposite to the customary forms of triumphs and inaugurations among temporal princes; and then by permitting such reproachful treatment, such barbarous cruelty, such pain and suffering, such universal insolence and scorn to prevail against him, in that passion and crucifixion, to which this procession was, as it were, the preface and first setting out. For,

3. Another end served by these uncommon respects paid to our blessed Saviour at that time, was the ministering fresh matter for the malice of his enemies to work upon, and opening a more direct passage to his bitter and ignominious death. St. Peter observes most truly, that Jesus was delivered up to death by *the counsel and foreknowledge of God*; and that nothing passed in this whole matter but what his almighty wisdom *had before determined to be done*. But still they who conspired that death of his were left to their own devices, and acted upon principles and choice so free, that the whole was brought about by human and ordinary means. It is one marvellous instance of the divine wisdom and power, to permit the unrighteousness of men, without any just imputation of the guilt contracted by it; and then to make those sins, which are not thought fit to be restrained, instrumental to excellent purposes. Purposes altogether unknown to the actors, and foreign to, nay sometimes destructive of, their designs in committing them. And never was the glory of these attributes more eminently illustrated than in the sufferings of our dear Redeemer. God had indeed ordained that his innocent Son should die by the inveterate malice and barbarity of the Jews, but that malice and barbarity were entirely their own. And therefore the apostle, who mentions the *council and determination of God*, as to the event, does not forbear, as to the quality of the fact, to pronounce those hands *wicked* by which the holy Jesus *was crucified and slain*. Now the reason of this is obvious. For those very actions of our Lord, which should have won the Jews over to a belief of and reverence for him, were by their prejudice and envy so perverted, as to become so many fresh provocations to their malice, for hastening his intended destruction. Thus the miracle upon Lazarus in par-

ticular, which (as was shewed before) put the unprepossessed multitudes upon celebrating the glories of this mighty Prophet, had a quite different operation upon the jealous rulers; for *from that day forward they took counsel together to put him to death*. Nor did their spite stop there; but, enraged at the influence this miracle had upon the people, they were for removing out of the way that very person who was the living testimony of it; and *consulted to put Lazarus also to death; because that by reason of him many of the Jews went away, and believed on Jesus*. We are not much to wonder, if men so unreasonably bent upon mischief were exasperated, upon every expression of inclination and zeal for so hated a rival in the affections of the people. And hence it was that the pomp and acclamations of this day's Gospel, however mean and despicable in themselves, yet meeting with minds already inflamed and sore, galled them to that implacable degree implied in that reflection upon them, *'Perceive ye how ye prevail nothing? behold, the world is gone after him*. This quickened them in their measures, and confirmed them in the expedience of his dying for the people, in that wicked sense intended by **Caiaphas*. And accordingly two days after they strike up their bargain with Judas to betray him. Thus our Lord, who foresaw every consequence distinctly, suffered the officious respects of a well-meaning multitude to draw on his passion, by exasperating his bloodthirsty enemies, and rendering them more vigorous and impatient in the execution of their villainous designs.

4. I can by no means think it unreasonable to believe, that our Lord admitted of these honours from the people, as he did the costly ointment the *'day before*, not merely for the value of the things themselves, but in a great measure for the mysteries represented by them. The ceremonies and hosannas applied to Jesus upon this occasion seem more peculiarly to have belonged *"to the feast of Tabernacles*. A festival instituted to commemorate the Israelites dwelling in tents or booths, when they came up out of the land of Egypt. ** But if we allow any such typical importance in this, as the Scriptures expressly attribute to some other Jewish festivals, when could those boughs, those praises and prayers, be so fitly, so significantly used, as in honour to this *Ystem out of the root of Jesse*; to that righteous servant whose name is *the Branch*; to that Son of God who (as the Evangelist expresses it) *ἐσκήνωσεν ἐν ἡμῖν*, vouchsafed to pitch his tent among men; to dwell in a tabernacle of human flesh; and who therefore was now celebrated with hosannas, upon so many accounts his own?*

Again, in regard our Lord himself declares that Mary anointed his *b body* to the burial, though it does not certainly appear to us that she had any such end of that action in view at the time of doing it; what should hinder us from inferring, by parity of reason, that these multitudes and all their triumphant pomp (though not by them

p John xi. 53. *q* Ib. xii. 10, 11. *r* Ibid. 19. *s* Matt. xxvi. 2, 3. *t* Comp. John xii. 3 and 12. *u* Levit. xxiii. 39, 40. *v* Ainsw. in loc. *x* 1 Cor. v. 8. *y* Isai. xi. 1. *z* Zech. iii. 8. vi. 12. *a* John i. 14. *b* Matt. xxvi. 12. John xii. 7.

designed for such a purpose) were a type and prelude of our Lord's resurrection and ascension to the right hand of God? Nay, to that more glorious and more triumphant pomp of the general judgment? For then shall this once meek and humble King come with the attendance, not of young children and a vulgar train, but troops of angels and blessed spirits innumerable. In a figure as becoming an universal Conqueror and Lord, as this before us was suitable to the character and condescension of a suffering Saviour. Then shall the shouts of heavenly hosts awaken the whole world from their sleep of death, and strike his enemies with a terror and confusion, to which the consternations, upon this approach to Jerusalem, bear some, though but a feeble resemblance. And indeed these seem such meditations as the Church designed to carry our thoughts forward to in a more especial manner, by introducing with this portion of Scripture a season of more than ordinary devotion; the two great uses whereof are to assist us in commemorating our Lord's first, and in making due preparation for his second advent.

Now to this preparation somewhat considerable may be contributed by those many practical inferences which naturally result from the foregoing particulars. I instance at present in these four only:

1. The example of our blessed Master, advancing so cheerfully towards his sufferings, should animate and confirm all his disciples in taking up their cross, when it shall please God at any time to lay it before them. It should fortify them against such sufferings especially as more directly tend to the service of the truth and the benefit of their brethren. Nor ought it in those cases to damp our resolution and zeal, that we suffer wrongfully, or for them who have not merited well at our hands. For in these respects, above all, is the blessed Jesus our pattern; who was so well contented to be betrayed into the hands of wicked men, and to die upon a cross, *'the just for the unjust.'* *'He who knew no sin, was made sin for us, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.'* And except we endure, not only patiently, but even contentedly and gladly, when the honour of God and the salvation of souls are like to be the consequence of our afflictions, we do by no means copy after him, *'who hath herein left us an example that we should follow his steps.'*

2. Well were it, if the circumstances peculiar to this action were so considered as to regulate men's behaviour, when honour and greatness and fame endanger their prudence and their virtue; if they would prevail for such a deportment, even in the most shining merit, even in the most exalted station, that their humility and constancy of mind might never cease to be conspicuous. If, even in their gayest intervals, they would admit seasonable reflections, that they are moving toward death apace; that the condition of human nature allows but a short enjoyment of these advantages, putting the very best of the case; that they are exceeding apt to cut themselves yet shorter, by setting an edge upon the envy of others, and irritating

the malice of jealous competitors, to hasten the destruction, and rise upon the ruins of men better and more esteemed than themselves: in a word, would such but mortify their vanity by observing the worthlessness, the instability of popular applause and public respects, which they are so prone to be blown up and turned giddy with. The passage before us demonstrates how false a confidence we place in these advantages; what very reeds the affections of the people are; and how they bend to every wind of faction and interest, and malicious insinuation, even when most zealous, even when most sincere. For what security can any one have, that these affections shall be constant to him, when this most innocent, most inoffensive person, this best benefactor to mankind, whom his most inveterate enemies could not convince of any sin, did yet, after so many miracles of mercy, find these deserved hosannas changed, in five days' time, into those causeless, those importunate clamours, *'Crucify him, crucify him. Away with this man, and release unto us Barabbas!'*

3. The different behaviour of the rulers and the common people upon this occasion should be a warning to us, that we suffer not any person or private respects to bias us in matters of religion; for the resentments so directly contrary of the miracle, by which Lazarus was raised from the dead, shew what unequal judges of men and things prejudice and interest are; and that the success of the best doctrine and most sufficient evidence will turn at last upon the disposition of the persons to whom they are proposed. Thus it must needs be in the nature of the thing; moral persuasions cannot act mechanically and necessarily, but must, in order to their efficacy, presuppose a mind honest and free, willing to hearken and submit to reason. And thus it is also in the case of Christianity in particular. There is no one point of faith and practice but it may be, and hath been, abundantly vindicated from all the exceptions that lie against it. The chief cause why truth is not universally received, is, that all men do not come to the consideration of it with a spirit of meekness and love of the truth: and error and vice prevail, not from any substance and solidity of their own, so much as from that dead weight of corrupt inclinations which men bring along with them and cast into the scale. The distant opinions about the same things proceed from men not seeing with the same eyes and under the same prospects: some judge impartially, others are bribed and blinded; and though no man is wittingly deceived, yet many contribute to their own deceit by using false measures, which custom or advantage, or some other personal respect, imposes upon them for just and true; and therefore St. James prescribes the right method, first to put away *all filthiness and superfluity of naughtiness, and then to receive the engrafted word, which (so, and only so) is able to save our souls.* But,

4. The impressions I am principally desirous to leave upon my reader are such as regard the future coming of our Lord, prefigured by that of this day's Gospel; and in this type we all shall find subject

for our imitation. These multitudes came out to meet Jesus riding on an ass; but the same Jesus shall one day *make the clouds his chariot, and ride upon the heavens as it were upon an horse*. They sang the praises of the Son of David to a city who would not receive him as such; but he who hath already demonstrated himself to be that promised Son of David shall then come to convince the unbelieving world that he is the very Son of God. And we, like them, should all go forth to meet him; like them, I say, with the sincerity of disciples, with the innocence of children. Let us, like them, cut down the branches from our trees, those worldly vanities and carnal affections, which, like luxuriant boughs, must be lopped off, and cast under the feet of this heavenly King, by stooping to his holy discipline. Let us too spread our hearts, as they their garments, that every faculty and every thought may be subject to his dominion, and labour to adorn the body of this mystical head, the church and doctrine of Christ. So shall this clothing of flesh, which must shortly be put off, be resumed again with joy; and from a vessel of honour and sanctification here, become his attendant and companion into the heavenly Jerusalem. So shall we be qualified to bear our part in the most exalted sense of these hymns and acclamations, and in that day of salvation shout forth with gladness and thanksgiving unspeakable, *Blessed be the king that cometh in the name of the Lord*. Yea, blessed be he that cometh, not to suffer, but to reign; not to redeem, but to recompense. Hosanna to the meek Son of David! Hosanna to the glorious majesty of the Son of God! Blessed be the kingdom which is come to rule our hearts by grace! Blessed be the kingdom that cometh to reward our obedience with glory. *Blessed be our peace, who died unto sin once! Blessed be our righteousness, who liveth for ever unto God*. Hosanna to him who came to Jerusalem to be judged in great humility! Hosanna to him who cometh with terrible pomp to judge both the quick and the dead! *Hosanna in the highest!*

THE SECOND SUNDAY IN ADVENT.

THE COLLECT.

BLESSED LORD, who hast caused all holy Scriptures to be written for our learning; Grant that we may in such wise hear them, read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest them, that by patience, and comfort of thy holy word, we may embrace, and ever hold fast the blessed hope of everlasting life, which thou hast given us in our Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

^a Ps. xviii. civ.

^b Ephes. ii. 14. Rom. vi. 10. Jer. xxiii. 5, 6. 1 Cor. i. 30.

^c Rom. xv. 4.

THE EPISTLE. Rom. xv. 4.

4 *Whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope.*

the New. That by observing what happened to pious persons heretofore, and to others since, of whom they are types, we might be excited to the like virtue and constancy, by the supporting expectation of the like rewards for our sufferings.

5 *Now the God of patience and consolation grant you to be likeminded one toward another according to Christ Jesus : endue us with a spirit of meekness and forbearance, of which Christ Jesus, above all others, hath left us both a command and a pattern.*

6 *That ye may with one mind and one mouth glorify God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.*

as well as in voice and outward form ; and perfectly agree in joint endeavours to promote the honour of that God, who, under the Gospel, is distinguished by that peculiar title, *the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.*

7 *Wherefore receive ye one another, as Christ also received us to the glory of God.*

other, and not break communion for infirmities and different notions in matters of less concern, when it is considered how kind and condescending Christ himself hath been to both those sorts of men.

8 *Now I say that Jesus Christ was a minister of the circumcision for the truth of God, to confirm the promises made unto the fathers :*

Christ's presence and personal ministry among them ; and that by virtue of solemn promises, by which God had bound himself to their ancestors, whom he chose out of all the kindreds of the earth, to make them his own peculiar.

9 *And that the Gentiles might glorify God for his mercy ; as it is written, For this cause I will confess to thee among the Gentiles, and sing unto thy name.*

10 *And again he saith, Rejoice, ye Gentiles, with his people.*

worth taking in, even without any previous engagement to do so. And of this many express predictions are extant in the Jewish prophets.

11 *And again, Praise the Lord, all ye Gentiles ; and laud him, all ye people.*

4. The history and prophecies of the Old Testament are written for the benefit of us, who live under

5. And may the same God, who sustained them with his holy comforts, endue us with a spirit of meekness and forbearance, of which Christ

6. That we may preserve a true Christian communion in heart and affection, as

7. And great reason there is why Jew and Gentile converts should bear with each

8. If the Gentiles be apt to despise the Jews, let them remember that this people only had the privilege of

9, 10. Again, if the Jews be tempted to scorn the Gentiles, let them reflect that, though these were not under the same formal covenant, yet God thought them

11. For when these join the Gentiles with Jews, or

call upon the Gentiles to join in praise for spiritual mercies, (as David does,) it is implied that they should partake in the blessings they are to praise God for. And this is the strain in which not only David, (who speaks in the person of Christ,) but Moses long before, accosted heathen nations in.

12. *And again, Esaias saith, There shall be a root of Jesse, and he that shall rise to reign over the Gentiles; in him shall the Gentiles trust.* 12. And Isaiah describes the Messiah as an universal monarch, to whose victorious standard all people shall

flock, and with great security commit themselves to his government and protection. Since therefore both are received, both should respect and receive one another into communion and friendship, and unite in the same common design of promoting religion, and prosecuting the same hope.

13. *Now the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that ye may abound in hope, through the power of the Holy Ghost.* 13. And may God, the giver of this hope, grant you all to agree in the true faith, compose your differ-

ences, and inspire that charity and mutual forbearance which alone can justify this hope. For as this can be wrought in our hearts only by God's own Spirit, so the comforts of it belong to and are enjoyed by none who are not of a peaceable and meek disposition.

COMMENT.

In order to making a due improvement of this Scripture, three things, I conceive, are necessary :

- I. First, to explain the immediate occasion of it.
- II. Secondly, to consider the design and importance of the apostle's argument with regard to that particular occasion. And then,
- III. Thirdly, to bring the matter home by such inferences as may render it of use to ourselves and all Christians in general.

I. I begin with the immediate occasion upon which this portion of Scripture was at first delivered. For a right understanding whereof we must observe, that the church of Rome was made up of mixed converts, some of whom came over to the Christian faith from Jewish, and others from heathen principles. The former continued to observe and pay great veneration to the ceremonial law of Moses; not having yet vanquished the prejudice of education and custom, nor attained to a perfect understanding of that liberty which the Gospel allows to every Christian, with respect to matters in their own nature indifferent. And those persons, upon the account of that defect in their judgment, are called *weak in the faith*. The others, who had juster apprehensions of this point, made no difference in meats or days, or any such Levitical ordinances, but acted with all the freedom becoming men who were duly sensible that the new covenant had set them at large from the restraint of any such distinctions: and these, because rightly informed, and thoroughly satisfied in their own breasts, that what they

did the Gospel would bear them out in, are termed *the strong*. Now, had each of these sorts contented themselves with governing their own behaviour by their own principles, without censuring and condemning those of a contrary principle, they might still have thought and acted differently, and yet no harm had been done. But that which divided the church, dishonoured God, and weakened the common cause, was, that *the strong* reproached *the weak*, as superstitious and silly; and *the weak* abhorred *the strong*, as irreligious and profane. To heal this breach effectually, the apostle had plied both parties with great variety of arguments in the xivth chapter; and here in the xvth he addresses to them of sounder judgment, particularly exhorting those to compassion for their brethren's honest, though mistaken zeal, and to such allowances for their infirmities as might preserve an unity in affection where that in opinion could not be attained to.

The last and highest motive reserved for this purpose is taken from the example of our Saviour Christ, who, for our benefit, submitted to many things harsh and very grievous to him. In proof of this he urges a passage out of the Psalms, wherein David complains that the hard things said and done against God were levelled at and endured by him. But if this were true of David in his own person and his private capacity, it was much more so of him in his prophetic and typical capacity; for Christ, whose person David thus sustained, did not only suffer the reproaches of God's enemies, but suffered for them too, and bore the punishment and the malice of them both. And *to justify the application of this text to our Lord, the apostle begins the Epistle for this day with a reflection of general use for rightly understanding and improving by the writings of the Old Testament. *Whatever things, &c.*, intimating that the relations of good men's sufferings, and other matters contained there, were not barely an historical account of actions and events already past, but shadows and significations of others yet to come. And the use we ought to make of them is, from the examples of those holy persons, but especially of Jesus, the most absolute and perfect of all examples, to support our spirit and confirm our resolution with the prospect of a like glorious recompense for any inconvenience we shall submit to for the sake of God's honour and the service of our brethren. Thus much, I think, may suffice to explain the immediate occasion of this Scripture; and shall therefore proceed now to the

II. Second thing propounded, the design and importance of the apostle's argument with regard to the case of the persons then considered in it.

The design he drives at we have in that prayer, that God would bring those Christians of differing judgments to be *like minded one towards another, according to Christ Jesus*; that is, to such a due temper, such mutual kindness, such charitable behaviour, that the observers of those legal ordinances might no longer despise them, who

were well assured they were under no obligation to continue the observance of them; and that they, who in this persuasion observed them not, might leave off their hard censures of those, who, for want of better information, thought themselves still bound by them: that so, by such profitable condescensions on either side, as Christ hath left both a precept and pattern for, they would lay down all party quarrels, and heartily join in communion together. And for apprehending the force and reasonableness of this advice, we shall do well to attend to two things:

1. The strength of that motive whereby he expressly urges them to it, the example of our Saviour Christ.

2. The excellent effects like to be produced by it. And these again are two: (1.) The glory accruing to God by this charity and mutual forbearance, *That ye may glorify God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ*: and again, *Receive ye one another, as Christ also received us, to the glory of God*. (2.) The public good of the church. For thus much is hinted in that concluding prayer, where he begs of God *to fill them with all joy and peace in believing, that they might abound in hope, through the power of the Holy Ghost*.

1. First then, for the motive whereby this agreement is urged, The example of Christ. The propriety whereof will more fully appear, if we regard the persons between whom this controversy lay; and especially that sort of them, to whom the apostle more particularly addresses himself in this part of his discourse now under consideration.

The parties concerned were Jewish and Gentile converts, or, according to St. Paul's style elsewhere, *such as lived after the manner of the Jews, and such as lived as do the Gentiles*. Which last distinction I the rather mention; because, though it be not very probable that any Gentile converts thought themselves in bondage to the ceremonial law of Moses; yet it is by no means manifest that none at all among the Jewish converts were convinced of their release from that bondage. It is enough for the apostle's purpose that this prejudice was general, though not universal. And the substance of his reasoning may be comprised in this. Christ did not reject either Jew or Gentile, but united both to himself, by admitting them as members into the same mystical body; and the honour of God was greatly illustrated by this kind condescension. The persons therefore thus highly favoured, thus closely incorporated, could not do better than to remember and to copy after the goodness of their common Saviour and Head. It would ill become them to disdain or cast out those from their charity whom Christ did not shut out from his mercy. Especially since this whole matter was so ordered, that each of these had privileges peculiar to themselves; which ought in reason to set the one sort above the other's contempt. The Jew cannot be thought despicable, since Christ himself confined the honour of his presence, and the exercise of his prophetic office upon earth, to this people and

h Ver. 6.

i Ver. 7.

k Ver. 13.

l Gal. ii. 14.

persuasion only: since God looked upon them as his own, by a title distinct from the rest of mankind; since he gave them the option as it were, and engaged that to those first salvation should be sent. The Gentiles, it is confessed, had no such claims or covenants to produce; but yet so tender regard had God for them too, as to make them partners in the gospel grace. And the less ground these had to expect it, the more surprisingly great was the kindness that bestowed it. Thus was God glorified in respect of both. His justice and *truth* were conspicuous in receiving the Jews according to promise; and his *mercy* and goodness were eminently so, in receiving the Gentiles without the like promise. Both then were taken in, and if not both upon an equal foot, yet what was done freely is as evident a demonstration of love, as what was done to make good an antecedent engagement. Though in very deed, if we drive the point a little higher, both owe their acceptance to God's grace entirely: for even the binding himself by promise was God's one free act. And therefore the reason holds good, that persons thus equalled in the favour of God, and the benefits of the Christian dispensation, should by no means despise or cast off one another, but imitate an example to which all their own happiness is owing, by mutual compassion, and a very tender regard for each other's spiritual advantage, and that glory of God, which both sorts profess to make their common end, though they are not agreed by what methods it is best advanced. And therefore each endeavoured it in his own way, and took such measures as himself judged most expedient.

This reasoning from the example of our blessed Saviour receives yet greater enforcement, if we attend to the persons before whom this model is set to square their own actions by; now they are the *strong* men, such as were rightly apprised of their Christian liberty, and perfectly satisfied in the use of it. Admitting then their opinion of the matters in dispute to be most just, and the aspersions cast upon their conduct hard and undeserved, the effect of ignorance, nay, of inveterate prejudice; yet ought not the soundness of their own judgment, or the ill treatment they met with from their weaker brethren, either to make the breach wider, or so much as to keep it open between them. For what comparison can be made between the attainments of even the strongest Christians above the weakest, and the perfections of Christ above the very strongest? What account can be made of the bitterest, the most unjust reproaches, between one man and another, by any who reflects at all upon that perpetual, that virulent *contradiction of sinners*, which the holy Jesus *endured against himself*? If then the misery, the wretched darkness, the grievous, the numberless provocations of Jews and Gentiles both, did not so alienate his affections from either, but that he condescended in marvellous compassion to receive both into grace; shall any of the persons so undeservedly received disdain and damn one the other, for disagreeing about matters in their own nature indifferent?

Shall they be more severe, more implacable, for mere defects and innocent mistakes, to men of the same frame, and upon a level with themselves, than their God and Saviour hath shewed himself for wilful and deliberate offences, to which a simple error in judgment bears no manner of proportion? If some dissenting persons had by an inconsiderate zeal been transported beyond the bounds of charity and moderation, yet the honesty of their intentions might be allowed in abatement for their faults. Their ignorance should rather move pity than anger, and their very worst indiscretions find an easy pardon with them who had already been pardoned many more and much greater follies. The use of better knowledge is not to despise and condemn, but in *meekness to instruct* and edify those who for want of it *oppose themselves*. When the head vouchsafes to cherish the inferior members, those members should not do despite to and bear hard upon one another. And since he, who is strength in the abstract, did not think it beneath him to relieve and graciously accept our weaknesses: they, whose very best strength is but weakness, must not be so exalted with a fond conceit of this, as not to bear with the infirmities of men in some little measure weaker than themselves. In short, the whole scheme of our redemption, and every action of the blessed Jesus, is an admonition to all his disciples, that they ought greatly to humble and deny themselves in tenderness to others. And therefore no Christian answers his character, who so abounds in his own sense, as not, upon some occasions, to depart from his right, and make allowances for the failings and misapprehensions of his fellow Christians. So far, I mean, as this may conduce to the preserving of charity, to the advantage of religion in common, to the peace and benefit of differing parties, and to the honour of Almighty God; all which may be much illustrated and advanced by mutual condescensions. And thus I am brought to the other branch of the apostle's argument:

2. The excellent effects of such forbearance. Now they are two: the glory of God, and the benefit of the church.

The former is recommended to us in those passages: *That ye may with one mind and one mouth glorify God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.* And again, *Wherefore receive ye one another, as Christ also received us, to the glory of God.* The glory of God is so exquisite in itself, and so essential to him, that it is not in the power of any creature, strictly speaking, to add to or take away from it. All therefore which the Scripture intends by those expressions of *glorifying* or doing things *to the glory of God*, is only setting forth the excellence of that glory, which in reality is infinite, and always the same. And this is done when matters are so ordered, as both to testify in our own minds and to begot in other people's a due reverence and admiration of the divine majesty and perfections; when we win men over to, and make them in love with religion, the belief of those truths which God hath revealed, and the practice of those good works

by which he delights to be served. And in regard the Christian institution is that reasonable, that only acceptable service at present required from us; hence probably that title is added here, *the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ*; this being a style purely evangelical, and intimating that we do then most effectually contribute to God's glory, when we promote the growth and general esteem, and convince the world of a power, and the mighty advantages of the Christian religion.

Now how greatly concord and charity, compassion and mutual forbearance, unity in opinion and worship, and consent in action, where these can be had; and where they cannot, condiscension and patience and peace, denying ourselves, and pleasing and seeking the good of our brethren: how much those qualities, I say, make for the credit of any profession, and the engaging others to come into it, is too manifest to need a proof. They are effects so sensible, so perfectly agreeable to the temper and desires of every good man; so suited to the happiness and ease of private persons and public societies, that all sorts of men presently feel their kindly influence and general benefit. They must needs do so; for since all the misery and mischief and division in the world proceed from partiality, and a corrupt principle of *self-seeking*; it follows that no doctrine can so effectually recommend itself to the affections of considering persons, as by giving demonstration of its efficacy, in plucking up this root of bitterness, and disposing men to a meek and quiet spirit, to humility and patience, to all equitable allowances, and a generous zeal for the good of others, even at the expense of some trouble to themselves. And herein is the wisdom and goodness of God truly admirable, that he hath made our duty and our happiness, his own glory and the good of mankind, so inseparable, that the same methods tend to promote both; and these two, in effect, are but one thing expressed by different names, and considered under different respects. So natural and just is the apostle's reasoning here, which proceeds in the next place to urge these virtues upon the Romans from that other topic intimated in his prayer, which concludes the Epistle for the day: and that is,

2. The benefit of the church, of which we have two instances mentioned, *being filled with all joy and peace in believing, and abounding in hope through the power of the Holy Ghost*. As to the former, we may observe God invoked before, as *the God of patience and consolation*. Not merely, I suppose, by reason of the things being mentioned just before, but to accommodate the title to the subject-matter of the request introduced by it. And here again the apostle invokes the *God of hope*, to fill his servants with *joy and peace and hope*. By joining all which together he hints to us this most certain truth, that where patience and peace are, there will not fail to be comfort and joy: and that as these produce each other, so they cannot subsist or be reasonably hoped for without each other. "*Behold*, says David,

how good and joyful a thing it is, brethren, to dwell together in unity ! Profitable and good as the dew upon the hills, that waters and refreshes and crowns them with plenty. Pleasant and joyful as precious ointment, whose odours cheer the senses, and perfume the air with their fragraney. And thus it is, as in other matters, so in none more than in those of religion. When men glorify God with one mind and one mouth, and keep communion, notwithstanding some difference of judgment, their devotions are like a melodious concert, ravishing sweet ; where every voice and every instrument is tuned to the same key ; and though the parts are different, yet all strike into one perfect harmony. But the disagreement of opinions, seconded by that of affection, is like a jarring instrument, or voice out of tune, which breaks the concord quite, grates the ear with its harshness, and disturbs the whole composition. This inconvenience the pious wisdom of the church so far provides against, as to put the same forms of public prayer into all her children's mouths ; (which Grotius here seems to think this passage might allude to.) But if we do not pray and praise God *with one mind* as well as *one mouth*, much of the grace, of the cheerfulness, nay, and of the force too, is lost, which such devotions would have, by being entirely united and of a piece throughout. And so it is in other cases : there must be *peace in believing*, or there can be no true joy. There must be *patience* and allowances for ignorance and infirmities, matters of less moment ; charitable constructions of their behaviour who differ from us in their notions of things equivalent to the *meats* and *days* among these Roman converts, or there can be no *peace*. In the substantial parts of religion these Romans were perfectly agreed ; and it was not their differing in the circumstances, but their despising and condemning one another for such difference, that made the breach upon true Christian unity. Now nothing of indifferent temper can be of equal importance with charity. On the former the beauty and decency of religion may depend in some measure, but in the latter its very life and being properly consists. It is not needful, perhaps not possible, that Christians should agree in every point, but in the main substance of religion they may and must ; for this only is *peace in believing*. And they who are thus far of a mind must not break communion upon every slight pretence ; not for things of importance so small, that the disturbance of the church's peace cannot be compensated by sticking pertinaciously to, or holding obstinately out against them. And when men have brought themselves to a due temper in these matters, all is safe and well ; they may have both *peace* and joy. Nay, which is more, they may *abound in hope through the power of the Holy Ghost* : the last good effect mentioned here, and that wherein the benefit of the church is greatly concerned.

For *hope*, in this place, will bear a very large interpretation. *Hope*, that the persons, thus charitable to their weaker brethren, will not fail of a reward proportionable to that of Christ, and other holy patterns, whose condescensions they are thus careful to copy after. *Hope*, that the weak may be gained by such forbearance and tender-

ness in the *strong*, whom rigour and stiffness and contempt are but like to exasperate and harden the more in their errors. *Hope*, that the substantial parts may be better established, and all believers improve in faith and a good life; when all lend their helping hand to truth and virtue, without suffering their different apprehensions, what may be fittest for the ornament, to divide their endeavours for the strength and security of this spiritual house. *Hope*, that this building may be still enlarged, and take in those who as yet are strangers and enemies to Christ; when they observe how powerful such religion is to beat down pride and envy, and every narrow selfish passion, and to inspire men with a godly zeal of not *pleasing themselves but their neighbours for their good to edification*. *Hope*, lastly, that they who maintain this concord upon earth shall not fail to be joined hereafter in that perfect love, that unanimous giving glory to God, which is the constant employment, the unspeakable bliss of blessed spirits in heaven: a bliss, of which this unity in the present life is not only an emblem, but a preparatory and indispensable condition. And this *hope* is by the apostle ascribed to *the power of the Holy Ghost*, and begged of God as his peculiar gift; because the crosses and temptations, the provocations and censures, the injuries and sufferings, the delay of God's most precious promises, the difficulties we meet with in doing our duty, the froward dispositions and different spirits of those we converse with, are an overmatch for corrupt nature. A nature which cannot bear its own, and much less other people's burden, without the assistance of a supernatural and divine power.

III. I shall now, in the last place, close this discourse with some practical inferences, which may bring St. Paul's argument nearer home, and render it of use to us and all Christians in general: as,

First, The ends, for which St. Paul says the Scriptures were designed, are an excellent direction how to judge of our improvement by reading and hearing the word of God. It were heartily to be wished that the gross neglect of conversing with these sacred oracles were not so scandalous, so ungrateful, as must needs one day rise up in judgment against the generality of Christians, and condemn them. But it is greatly to be feared withal, that matters will not be found much better with many who do read, and attend to, and spend much of their time and pains upon the Scriptures; yet all this very wrong, and to little or no true effect. Entering into the niceties of argument and expression, settling dark points of history, explaining difficult texts, and reconciling seeming contradictions; these are too often propounded as the chief end of such studies. And these, it must be granted, have their degree, not only of usefulness, but even of necessity. Without such labours we cannot make a full discovery of the treasures hidden there; but even the most perfect discovery does not answer the end of imparting those treasures; for the subtlest critic stops short, if he content himself with that excellence, and do not

proceed to the making a good Christian. Would a man demonstrate that he hath profited by the Scriptures? St. Paul tells him the proofs to be produced for it are *patience* and *comfort* and *hope*. Hath he learnt meekness and moderation to them who differ from him? Does he see the ignorance and infirmities of weaker Christians with temper and compassion? and instead of censuring and despising, labour to inform them better, and gain upon their affections by methods of gentleness, and all becoming condescensions? Can he bear the reproaches of them who are in the wrong, when he knows himself in the right? Can he put up injuries for God's sake, and quietly submit to affliction, when Providence lays it upon him? Does he support himself in hardships and temptations, under calumny and causeless contradiction, by the example of a suffering Saviour, and those other bright patterns of meekness and perseverance, whose trials and praises are recorded in those books? Does he labour diligently for peace and order, charity and godly unity? This if he does, he is instructed and mighty in the Scriptures indeed. But till the virtues commemorated and commanded there are copied out into his disposition and practice, *though he understand all mysteries and all knowledge*, yet this apostle tells him roundly, that all this while he is *nothing*, and *knows nothing as he ought to know*.

2. Secondly, When the glory of God and the benefit of Christians in common are mentioned as the ends and excellent effects of unity, this shews us the errors of those men who foment divisions, and kindle party quarrels, upon pretence of God's honour, and the advantage of religion. Even peace, it is true, may be purchased too dear; and therefore we must be sure that it be *peace in believing*. But when the fundamentals of religion are well secured, then to be over-tenacious in matters of less moment, is not to serve the cause of God and truth, but our own passions and prejudices and private interests. The spiritual Jerusalem is never so strong as when the builders contrive to make it a city at unity within itself. ^a And we can never please ourselves too little, nor our less judicious neighbours too much, provided we make the apostle's rule the end and measure of our condescensions; which is, to stick at nothing that may be for *their good to edification*. But for preventing any misconstruction, which either unwary or designing men may put upon this inference, I must earnestly entreat my reader to consider,

3. Thirdly, That the matter in dispute between these Jew and Gentile converts was perfectly indifferent. My meaning is, that it was so, not only in its own nature, as not essential to religion, but it was so in point of use and practice, by reason no authority had interposed so as positively to command or forbid the doing it; and therefore all required in this case was, that every man should be satisfied in his own conduct, and not censure or despise them who thought and acted otherwise. ^b Both sorts are supposed sincere in their way, and both accepted by God for that sincerity; therefore neither of them

obnoxious to the contempt or condemnation of men: this was the state of their case at that time. But what advantage can fairly be drawn from hence for holding out against the commands of our superiors in matters of like temper now, or to the prejudice of that wholesome discipline, which, for the sake of order and edification, prescribes or limits the use of things in themselves indifferent, is not easy to comprehend. When human power is exercised in these, it acts in its proper sphere: these are indeed its strict and only province. That which is good in its own nature is already enjoined to its hand, and all that our governors can do is only to confirm and give it a fresh sanction. That which is evil in itself no human power can oblige men to. And if indifferent things be thus restrained as to the use of them, be it in what case it will, they are not thereby changed as to their nature. The relation they bear to religion does not make them cease to be such; for then they could not be imposed or removed at the pleasure of our governors; and consequently, remaining still indifferent, they cannot cease to be a proper subject for human prudence and authority to exercise itself in. But though the things themselves are still indifferent; yet peace and charity, unity and obedience are not, cannot be so. So wide a distance is there between a case where there was no antecedent command, but every man is left at large to govern himself by his own judgment; and one wherein public authority hath given rule to the practice of private persons, and determined the use of that which is judged most conducive to the edification of the whole community under its care.

4. Fourthly, It follows from this discourse of the apostle, that there may be a true Christian unity preserved among those who are far from being agreed in every particular relating to religion. *Both he that did, and he that did not eat, did it unto the Lord*; that is, each of them went upon a principle of conscience. The Jewish party were certainly in the wrong, but their error was tolerable; the only thing that made it otherwise was their uncharitableness attending that error. And hence it is that the method taken by St. Paul for bringing these parties to a good understanding, is not to argue them all into one opinion, but, waving the merits of the point in controversy, to forbid uncharitableness to those of the contrary opinion. And the reason why no more than this was necessary is contained in these words; *The kingdom of God is not meat and drink: but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost. For he that in these things serveth Christ is acceptable to God, and approved of men.* These were not of the substance of religion, and therefore Christian communion might and ought to be kept up, notwithstanding any differences, where the foundations are not struok at. These men were free, nay they would do well, to persuade and gain upon one another by calm and fair arguing, by all gentle and amicable methods: but none of them was allowed to censure and to condemn those who understood less than themselves. And this was sufficient to preserve unity of affection, as

that again is sufficient for the purposes of God's glory, and the common good, and as much as the state of the church in the present world stands in need of.

5. Lastly, We shall do well very diligently to observe the means prescribed here for bringing us all to this tempor. And they are such as follow: reflecting with all due humility upon the infinitely greater condescensions of God and Christ towards ourselves; 'who are the very best of us infinitely more unworthy their compassion than the weakest or worst of our brethren can possibly be of ours; attending impartially, and indeed especially, to the good and commendable qualities of them that differ from us, and not only to their errors and their faults. For as it will ill become them to shew rigour in less matters, whose only hope is owing to mercy in greater; so the general cause of censure and contempt, is the overrating our own qualifications and advantages, and overlooking those of our brethren; seeing nothing in ourselves, or those of our own side, but what magnifies them in our esteem; and nothing in those of a different judgment, but what represents them little and despicable in our eyes. Bigotry and pride and self-love are the cursed fomenters of uncharitableness and faction; as humility, candour and meekness, largeness of heart, and a zeal for the good of Christians in general, are the sure establishers of temper and peace and love. With these therefore if we thoroughly possess our souls, *the God of hope will fill us with all joy and peace in believing, and we shall abound in hope through the power of the Holy Ghost.*

THE GOSPEL. St. Luke xxi. 25.^f

25 *And there shall be signs in the sun, and in the moon, and in the stars; and upon the earth distress of nations, with perplexity; the sea and the waves roaring; frightful sights in the heavens, calamities and confusion over all the earth, horrible tempests at sea.*

26 *Men's hearts failing them for fear, and for looking after those things which are coming on the earth: for the powers of heaven shall be shaken.*

27 *And then shall they see the Son of man coming in a cloud with power and great glory.*

tended with a vast retinue of angels, and all the demonstrations of omnipotence and majesty divine.

28 *And when these things begin to come*

25. When Christ shall come to execute judgment, there shall be many dreadful signs of his approach; prodigious darkness, and

26. Dread and despair of wicked men, whose guilty hearts shall then misgive them, when they see these terrors take hold of, and their convulsions reach even heaven itself.

27. And then shall they behold the Son of man appear as a visible judge, attended

28. But let not the right-

to pass, then look up, and lift up your heads; for your redemption draweth nigh. such it shall be a day of joy, of speedy and complete deliverance from all their misery and trouble.

29 *And he spake to them a parable; Behold the fig tree, and all the trees;*

30 *When they now shoot forth, ye see and know of your own selves that summer is now nigh at hand.*

31 *So likewise ye, when ye see these things come to pass, know ye that the kingdom of God is nigh at hand.*

weather drawing on, than these signs are, that Christ will then quickly enter upon his glorious kingdom.

32 *Verily I say unto you, This generation shall not pass away, till all be fulfilled.*

as concerns the destruction of the Jewish polity; and the rest, which regards the universal judgment, is no less sure.

33 *Heaven and earth shall pass away: but my words shall not pass away.*

as the most fixed and immutable things, yet are not even these so firm as my predictions of these things. They shall then be changed and dissolved, but my word shall not be changed, nor shall one tittle I have now delivered fail of its designed event.

cous de daunted at this general consternation; for to what I foretell is most true.

31. For the shooting of leaves and buds is not a surer token of the warm

32. Many persons now alive shall see so much of these prophecies accom-

33. For though heaven and earth are looked upon

COMMENT.

In this Scripture we have the three following particulars remarkable:

I. ^aThe terrible forerunners of the last judgment, and how fit these prognostics are to warn us of its approach.

II. ^bThe visible and majestic appearance of our Judge.

III. ^cThe different resentments with which men shall entertain the notice of his coming, according to their circumstances and expectations.

I. I begin with the terrible forerunners of this judgment, and the fitness of such prognostics to give us warning of our Lord's approach. Of these we have a full and very dreadful account in the writings both of the prophets in the Old, and of the apostles and evangelists in the New Testament. And by consulting the marginal ^kreferences, the reader may quickly satisfy himself, that no circumstance of horror shall then be wanting which may render this solemnity awful and great: that no part of the creation shall be exempted from contributing to its terrible pomp; but all nature will feel the mighty shock, and labour under an universal convulsion. Above us, fire and vapours and pillars of smoke, thunderings and lightnings, gloominess and thick darkness, prodigies

^a Ver. 25, 26.

^b Ver. 27.

^c Ver. 26, 28.

^k See Isai. xiv. xxx. xxxiv.

Dan. vii. Joel ii. Zeph. i. Hagg. ii. Malachi iv. Matt. xxiv. Mark xiii. Heb. xii. Rev. xx.

and fearful sights; the light of the sun put out, the moon turned into blood, the stars starting from their orbs, and the heavens shrivelled up like a flaming scroll. Upon earth, unnatural treachery, shameless vice, and all manner of wickedness; wars and commotions, famines and pestilences, storms and earthquakes; the dreadful ness whereof, we are told, was but very feebly represented by all those astonishing manifestations of God's presence in mount Sinai, which even Moses was not able to sustain without exceeding fear and trembling. And if the terrors thought necessary to beget a just reverence for God's law at its promulgation were so insupportable, what can we think will the day of wrath and vengeance implacable be, when the bold contemners of his law are to be made examples to all eternity? And since fear is a passion to which even disingenuous tempers lie open, when gentler motives can take no hold of them, the last of all impressions that stubborn sinners harden themselves against, it was very proper for our blessed Lord to give such descriptions of his coming to judgment, that they who will not be constrained by the greatness of his ⁱⁿ love, may at least be persuaded by the knowledge of his terrors; and live like men who have fair warning what hangs over their heads, and what will one day be most certainly executed upon all them whom this notice does not affright into better manners.

But this is not all I mean by the fitness of these terrors to rouse men into thought, and put them upon considering whom they have to deal with: my intention is to shew, that these signs foregoing are demonstrative evidences of a general judgment to follow, and upon that account excellently qualified to awaken in our minds an expectation of the thing which they undeniably prove. For what are all those plagues and prodigies and outrageous wickednesses mentioned in the Scriptures here referred to, but so many instruments of angry justice, which God takes into his hand, as he sees occasion, for chastising the disobedient or cutting off the incorrigible? In some of which he strikes immediately by himself; in others he arms natural causes against them; and in a third sort he contrives it so ⁱⁿ that the sins of one man shall scourge those of another. But still, by all these ways he executes vengeance; and therefore the inference common to them all is, that God does observe, and think himself concerned to punish, wicked actions in some way, and at some time or other. Now nothing can be more apparent than that these punishments do not make an exact distinction between good and evil men in the present state of things; and therefore the character of a righteous and holy Judge requires that there should be a stricter reckoning behind for bringing those to justice who escape here, and making those good men amends hereafter who endure misery and wrong here, and are involved in public calamities, together with the guilty wretches whose sins had provoked them. Were no wicked men punished, no good men afflicted or oppressed, or did every man receive now in hand in full tale and exact proportion to his deserts, we could not then indeed urge the

¹ Heb. xii. 21.

^m 1 Cor. v. 14, 11.

ⁿ Chrys. tom. v. serm. 51. p. 345. ed. Eton.

same necessity of another judgment in reserve. But, as it is, the same justice which disposes God to punish some, must needs dispose him to punish all that continue refractory; and, by setting the present inequality of his distributions right, reveal to the whole world the righteousness of his providence. While God acts in the quality of a governor, as in the present state of affairs he does, it may suffice that virtue be encouraged and vice discountenanced in general: but since his attributes require he should act as a judge too, they must imply justice to every cause that shall come in issue before him, and a due recompense nicely awarded according to the behaviour of each man in particular. If all shall be judged, all shall have right done them. And therefore this, which is now done but in part, shall be done one day in its utmost perfection. And its being done in part to some in the sufferings of this world, is an evidence that God will find a time for doing right in full to all in the next world. For the judge of all the earth could not answer that character, if so much as one single inhabitant in it did not, at one time or other, *"receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad."*

II. The second observation is, the visible and majestic appearance of this Judge. *"Then shall they see the Son of man coming in a cloud with power and great glory."* I need not spend time in proving that this *Son of man* is no other than our blessed Saviour. In this the Scriptures are most express, that the *very Jesus of Nazareth, whom the Jews slew and hanged on a tree, is ordained of God to be the judge of quick and dead.* And the result of this argument is, that Christ shall execute judgment in his human nature; and manifest himself to the senses of the parties concerned. That very body, which was born and died, was buried and rose again the third day, that ascended into heaven, and is now seated at the right hand of God, shall locally descend and sit upon a throne; and, as his divine nature renders him an all-wise and almighty, so shall his appearance in our human form render him at that day an audible and a visible Judge.

But though he shall then appear in the same nature, yet shall he not appear in the same manner as he did in the days of his flesh upon earth. That body formerly was exposed to poverty and weakness, to reproach and contempt, to suffering and pain, to agonies and death. These, like a thick cloud, did eclipse and intercept the divine excellencies, which even then *"dwelt in him fully and bodily."* But at his last coming, that veil shall be quite done away, and he will break forth in all the lustre of an incarnate God: his body, like a fountain of pure light, outshining the sun in its strength; the putting out of which, and the rest of the heavenly luminaries, *"some have understood only of the transcendent beauty of our Lord's glorified body, in comparison whereof their brightest rays will be as night and gross darkness."* Such a glorious change shall there be then in the person of our once humble and despised Jesus; so noble a recompense shall his crucified body receive for all the pain and shame of the cross; so

^o 2 Cor. v. 10.

^p Ver. 27.

^q Acts x. 36, 39, 41, 42.

^r Coloss. ii. 9.

^s Chrysost. Theoph.

exquisitely resplendent, so all-divine his presence, infinitely above what any resemblances taken from created beings can give us any tolerable idea of, above what even inspired writers could express, above what the largest finite mind can stretch itself to conceive.

The splendour of this coming will be yet more increased by the manner and circumstances of it: by Christ's being seated upon a cloud: which we have reason to understand in the plain and literal sense, 'whether we reflect upon the manner of God's usual manifestation of his presence in the Old Testament, or our Lord's transfiguration in the New, or especially ^a the testimony of those angels that attended at his ascension. For while the apostles then present were *looking steadfastly toward heaven as he went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel; which also said, Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? this same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven.* All which, compared with our Lord's own declarations ^z concerning his second coming, with what St. Paul ^y foretells, and ^z St. John foresaw, are abundantly reasonable to justify the generally received opinion, that, as our blessed Saviour went up into heaven, so he shall return from thence to judgment, upon a true and material cloud.

By the power mentioned here some have understood ^a those heavenly hosts which, we are assured, shall then attend this Judge. But besides this military sense of the ^b word, I see no reason why we should not extend it to all those demonstrations of majesty and omnipotence in which the Lord Christ shall then exert himself: such as opening the graves, assembling all nations and ages of men, and compelling the most mighty, the most unwilling, to obey the unwelcome summons: doing himself honour upon his enemies, rescuing and rewarding his once despised and afflicted servants, unlocking the mysteries of providence, exercising a dominion uncontrollable, and displaying all the attributes of the Godhead in exquisite perfection. This shall be the power, this the glory of that great day; and all this done in a manner sensible and conspicuous to the whole world, that ungodly wretches may look on him whom they have pierced with their blasphemous impieties, and feel the terrors which they disdained to fear; that the righteous may see and know whom they have trusted, and gaze with joy and transport inexpressible on the adorable excellencies of him whom their soul loved, even when distant and unseen. But I ought to remember that these are reflections which more properly belong to my third head.

III. The different resentments with which the approach of this judgment will be entertained, according to men's different circumstances and expectations from it. This is collected from the 26th and 28th verses, each of which deserves our particular notice.

^a Exod. xvi. 10. xix. 9. xxxiv. 5. Levit. xvi. 2. Numb. xv. 15. 1 Kings viii. 10. Isai. vi. 1. ^z Pet. i. 17. ^u Acts i. 9, 10. ^x Mark xiii. 26. xiv. 69. ^y 1 Thess. iv. 17. ^z Rev. xiv. 14, 15, 16. ^a Matt. xvi. 27. xlv. 31. xlv. 31. 1 Thess. iv. 16. 2 Thess. i. 7, 8. Matt. xiii. 41, 42. ^b *δυναμεις*.

St. Luke hath related our Lord's prediction thus; *'that there shall then be great perplexity; that men's hearts shall fail them for fear, and looking after those things which are coming on the earth.* St. Matthew, *'that then all the tribes of the earth shall mourn;* and St. John is yet a little more particular, *'Behold, he cometh in the clouds, and every eye shall see him, and they also which pierced him: and all kindreds of the earth shall wail because of him.* From which last passage, and from the command here to some, that they should look up and esteem those warnings of our Lord's last coming a matter of joy and happiness to them, we are sufficiently warranted to understand these fears and confusions as passions not common to all promiscuously, but which belong and are peculiar to the wicked; such as have reason to apprehend, that a judgment will turn to their disadvantage: whereas the righteous, on the other hand, are encouraged to wish and long for it, as that which brings on and shall complete their *'redemption.* And how just ground there is for these so contrary resentments, a very few words may suffice to illustrate:

I. For, first, where shall we find terms to express the tumults and terrors of those guilty breasts whom this day *'overtakes* (as we are told it shall do very many) *unawares?* Not *unawares* for want of sufficient warning; much might be then alleged in their excuse: but *unawares* for want of necessary preparation, and attending to that warning, which leaves no room for apologies. Where shall the refractory Jews, where the professed infidels, where the enemies and persecutors of Christ and his members then appear? Where the treacherous apostle, that betrayed and sold him; the priests and rulers, that set him at nought; the corrupt judge, who, against his own conscience, condemned him; the malicious rabble, that preferred a robber and a murderer before this Prince of life and glory; the hardened wretches who insulted over his dying agonies; the bribed soldiers and suborning scribes, who, by false reports, endeavoured to stifle and destroy the credit of that resurrection which was the certain pledge of this final judgment? What shame and confusion shall cover these faces when his cross, that *sign of the Son of man*, heretofore a mark of ignominy and pain, shall be set up as a banner, and they who fought manfully under this standard shall then be found the only happy conquerors? With what amazement will the scoffers at Christ and his Gospel behold this once mock-king and universal monarch, and the thorns with which he was crowned in malice and barbarous sport converted into rays of light and glory, attended *'with thousand thousands, and ten thousand times ten thousand guards of angels standing before him*, each of which single hath hitherto been always too dazzling bright for mortal eyes to sustain? But why do I speak of these men? Let us come nearer home. What thoughts will then start up and force themselves upon those obstinate, those dissolute sons of pleasure and vanity, who now, in defiance of their baptismal vows and better education,

c Ver. 26, 28.

d Matth. xxiv. 30.

e Rev. i. 7.

f Ver. 28.

g Ver. 34.

h Dan. vii. 10.

make such a jest of a crucified God, and laugh at the threatenings of his judging the world, as a fable cunningly devised to keep silly souls in awe, the artifice of politicians, the talk of churchmen, contrived to enslave easy credulous creatures that know no better, and to check the sallies of brave and daring wickedness! Alas! these men shall find, to their infinite cost and misery, that their preachers have not talked all this for their trade, but spoke the words of truth and soberness; and if in anything they swerved from truth, it hath been only in drawing these horrors less than the life, and not being capable of representing the sinner's danger in its just proportions and blackest colours. What a dismal change shall then succeed, when the insolent mockers of God and his wise dispensations, the mimicry of profane wit and vile burlesques of Scripture, that filthy nauseous froth which is now thought to give such relish to conversation, shall sink into fruitless confessions of truth found too late; when every blasphemous tongue shall be struck dumb with guilt and despair, and in the place of loud laughter at the most sacred things, exposed by insolent buffoonery, shall succeed weeping and wailing, trembling knees, wringing hands, and gnashing teeth thenceforth and for ever!

What hills shall the profane swearers call to fall upon them, what mountains to cover them, when he, whose blood and wounds have been so wantonly tossed upon their tongues, shall come in flaming fire to revenge these rude affronts of his most holy name and sufferings? Yes, impious wretches, yea, the plagues of God shall confound you, and the damnation you have so often and so loudly called for will not always linger: your wishes are heard, hell hath opened her mouth, and the wrath of the Most High comes rolling on a main; it rushes on you like a mighty torrent, and sinks you without mercy into the lake of fire unquenchable, there to be ever tormented with that devil and his angels to which your bitter curses have so often in dreadful formality delivered up yourselves. Nay, where shall even those (in comparison modest) sinners appear, who in words are content to own that Lord whom in works they too palpably deny, and discredit, at least, a religion which they do not professedly disclaim? The intemperate and lascivious, the greedy worldlings, or the glittering great ones, that spend their time and wealth in vice or vanity, that give us the bearing when we recommend treasures in heaven and spiritual joys, but have their hearts still fastened upon the dross of riches and sensual delights? And what will these things profit in the day of wrath? This Judge is not to be bribed with money nor awed with pomp: they must then render a strict account, not only how they got, but how they employed their possessions, and be pierced through and through with this stabbing reflection, that the talents squandered away in stately buildings, costly apparel, numerous equipage, and worldly grandeur, are now become the instruments of their ruin, which, if expended in clothing the naked, and feeding the hungry members of Christ, might have opened them a passage into everlasting habitations of bliss and glory. In vain will they then labour to divert the thoughts of judgment with company and diversion, or to

drown them in wine and debauches; the Judge is at the door, and will be seen and heard and felt, whether they will or no.

Think then, sinner, think, if thou darest, on this fatal day, and know there is not upon earth a creature so despicably cowardly and poor spirited as he whom vice detains in wilful ignorance, and bereaves of courage to see and believe the truth. And were not this better thought of while thinking will do some good? Few men are so desperately hardened and forsaken as not to be powerfully awakened by the bitterness of affliction, the languishings of sickness, or the near approach of eternity, when a death-bed sets them upon the brink of it. But if God in his just judgment suffer some to go out of the world as insensible as they lived in it, yet even they shall find, at the time spoken of here, that God is in very good earnest, and will repay sinners to their face. And if the apprehensions of this, even here and at some distance, are so insupportable as wounded consciences daily find and feel, though the gate of mercy be not yet shut, what rage, what remorse, what confusion and despair shall overwhelm those lost wretches who have outstayed the day of grace, who have a gaping hell just before their eyes, and no prospect left but that of fiery indignation already gone out to devour the ungodly? How infinitely frightful must these things be when actually present, which even afar off chill all our blood and spirits, and are not to be borne! frightful even now above what even the most melancholy fears can paint. But when all hope, all remedy is past, Jesus defend us! who may then abide the ghastly object? *O consider this, then, consider it and be wise, ye that forget God,* for otherwise, be assured, the time is coming when he will *pluck you away, and there shall be none to deliver you.*

2. But praised be the divine mercy for it, there is a bright side of this judgment too; for as for the righteous and faithful, it is not so with them. Words are as much too weak, and the utmost range of imagination as far too short, for the transports and overflowing of these men's joy, as for the anguish and amazement of the slothful and wicked servants. It is not indeed to be supposed that the very best of mortals can look steadfastly up to this tribunal, and all its terrible pomp, without any manner of misgiving or concern; for even the best deceive themselves if they say they have no sin. And where there are sins to reproach one's self withal, and great and numberless frailties and imperfections to lament, there we are not to wonder if there be some thoughts of heart not perfectly composed; but whatever those may be while the eye is turned inward upon their own breasts, yet when it looks up to Jesus, that *Lamb slain to take away the sins of the world*, the cloud is presently dispersed by faith in his sacrifice; the apprehensions of a judgment are tempered with hope and holy trust; and then no longer the effect of despondence and doubt, but only of humility and godly shame. When sins have been repented of and forsaken, we see God, not as an implacable avenger, but a reconciled and tender Father; and are sure this Judge will not be *extreme*

to mark what hath been done amiss by them who hath undone it all again in second thoughts and serious amendment. Such can behold the glories and triumphs of infinite mercy in the Son of God, now bright and all-divine, once condescending so low as to die for their sakes. They can depend upon all fair allowances for infirmities and temptations from one who hath felt the weakness of human nature in his own person, and did not disdain himself to be tempted. They can support themselves with this confidence, that he who ^kreconciled them at the expense of his own blood, while they were yet enemies, will not fail to save them by his own life and power, now they are made friends: and had they been allowed the liberty of choosing their own judge, prudence and interest must have directed them to him, who had expressed such unexampled kindness; one so infinitely good in his own nature, and so infinitely tender of and good to them. This therefore is their comfort, this their security, that in his wounds they have a sure refuge; that they are united as living members to this mystical Head; that he accounts their happiness his own; that his ^lfaithfulness and truth are inviolably engaged for their pardon, and there can be no ^mcondemnation to any who are thus in Christ Jesus. The plagues and fears, which wound the wicked mortally, fly over the good man's head, and not one of them touches him. This gives to such, boldness to lift up their heads, even in that dreadful day, that their redemption now draws nigh; the utmost and most desirable accomplishment of that great work, so wonderfully begun, so wisely carried on for God's elect; the end of their warfare, the pardon of their transgressions; the recompense of all their toil and sufferings; the speedy and entire deliverance from oppression and wrong, from danger and temptation, from corruption and mortality; and, which is best of all, from frailty and imperfection, and the very possibility of sinning any more. This is that blissful day in which their vile bodies are to be ⁿchanged and fashioned like unto Christ's glorious body; their souls satisfied with, and likened to the divine excellencies, their every faculty enlarged; and they from henceforth seeing, admiring, praising, loving, living and reigning with their Lord for ever. Such is the honour all his servants have; such is the bounty of their gracious Master; so transcendently great the reward for poor and mean, because they have been faithful and sincere, labourers; so bright, so massy their crown, ^ofor the light afflictions of a moment; an eternity of happiness in heaven; happiness as exquisite as men are capable of receiving, for a moment of sorrow and labour upon earth.

O blessed voice of the archangel, that shall proclaim this general jubilee! O joyful sound of the last trump, that shall awaken the heaps of dust to incorruption and immortal glory! O welcome tidings to those righteous souls who shall receive the warnings of this judgment with that peaceful song of the prophet, *Behold your God! Behold, your God and Saviour comes with a strong hand, his arm shall rule for him: behold, his reward is with him, and his work before him!* O gra-

^k Heb. ii. 4; Rom. v. 10.

^l John i. 9.

^m Rom. viii. 1.

ⁿ Phil. iii. 2.

^o 2 Cor. iv. 17.

^p Isai. xl. 9, 10.

cious sentence to all that love and fear him; *¶ Come, ye blessed children of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the beginning of the world!* O happy stewards, whose talents well employed shall then be thought worthy that commendation, *¶ Well done, good and faithful servants; because you have been faithful over a few things, I will make you rulers over many things: enter ye into the joy of your Lord!* *¶ Grant, blessed Lord, that these, and all thy holy Scriptures, may be so read, heard, marked, learned, and inwardly digested by us, that by patience, and comfort of thy holy word, we may embrace, and ever hold fast the blessed hope of everlasting life, which thou hast given us in our Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen."*

THE THIRD SUNDAY IN ADVENT.

THE COLLECT.

O Lord Jesu Christ, who at thy first coming didst send thy *¶ messenger to prepare thy way before thee; Grant that the* *¶ ministers and stewards of thy mysteries may likewise so prepare and make ready thy way, by* *¶ turning the hearts of the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, that at thy second coming to judge the world we may be found an acceptable people in thy sight, who livest and reignest with the Father and the Holy Spirit, ever one God, world without end. Amen.*

THE EPISTLE. 1 Cor. iv. 1.

1 Let a man so account of us, as of the ministers of Christ, and stewards of the mysteries of God. 1. Let Christians look upon their teachers, not as masters of their faith, or men acting for themselves, and upon their own heads, but as servants employed by Christ, our common Master. But withal, let them consider how honourable a service this is, since Christ hath made them his stewards, the dispensers of his word, and other means of grace, to the rest of the family.

2 Moreover, it is required in stewards, that a man be found faithful. 2. Now every body knows, that the main qualification for this post, and that which recommends the persons in it, is fidelity in their master's business.

[¶] Matt. xxv. 34.

[¶] Matt. xxv. 21.
^b 1 Cor. iv. 1.

[¶] Collect for the day.
^c Luke i. 17.

^a Matt. xi. 14.

3 *But with me it is a very small thing that I should be judged of you, or of man's judgment: yea, I judge not mine own self.* 3. But of this fidelity men are not so competent judges as to say who best does his duty, and who does it not

so well, and so to prefer one before another upon any external advantages which one may seem to have above another; and therefore the judgment of men is of no great weight with me; nay, I dare not rely upon my own judgment, so far as to depreciate others and prefer myself.

4 *For I know nothing by myself; yet am I not hereby justified: but he that judgeth me is the Lord.* 4. For though, I bless God, my conscience reproach me not with any neglect or mismanagment in my office, yet I will not be bold to say I am absolutely clear of any, because God will make a stricter inquiry into these matters, and knows me better than I do myself.

5 *Therefore judge nothing before the time, until the Lord come, who both will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and will make manifest the counsels of the hearts: and then shall every man have praise of God.* 5. Let this consideration therefore prevail with you to suspend such censures of your teachers, and do not anticipate the judgment of God; for all judging of others in this manner is at present rash and hasty and unseasonable.

You are yet in the dark, and want that evidence to proceed upon, which only he, who hath right and ability to judge the persons intrusted by him, will one day produce; for he will disclose many lurking motives, that no mortal eye could discover; he will make it plain to all the world, not only what each man did, but with what intent and disposition of mind he did it. And this is the time for those who have discharged their stewardship fairly and honestly, to be rewarded by their own Master and proper Judge, the just and all-seeing God.

COMMENT.

THE apostle, in the chapters before, had reproved these Corinthians for divisions and party-quarrels, sprung up among them, to the great disturbance of the church. These were chiefly fomented by some false teachers, who laboured to ingratiate themselves, by affected eloquence, suitable reasonings, and other popular arts, to the bringing the simplicity of the gospel, and those plain methods of teaching used by St. Paul and his assistants, into general disesteem. ^dThis drew on many invidious comparisons between their preachers; insomuch, that not only they who had been seduced into error, but even the orthodox Christians too began to distinguish themselves by their adherence to this or that person under whose ministry they had been baptized, or instructed in the faith. In opposition to such carnal and mischievous distinctions, St. Paul puts them in mind, that he, and his fellow-labourers in the gospel, were not, like the philosophers of old, men

^d Chap. i. 12. iii. 4.

ambitious of advancing new doctrines, or instituting peculiar sects called after their own names; but subordinate officers only, and such as made it their business to unite all their proselytes under one common head and master, Christ Jesus. The design of them all was the same, and their commission from one and the same hand; though they who acted by it were different, and acted in different capacities. The character then which they were to be considered under, and the esteem proportioned to it, must be such as belongs to persons in trust; so that no disciple gained over by their labours might be allowed to *glory in men*; since men were only instruments, chosen and used by the wise Master-builder for carrying up his spiritual house; the odification whereof would be best promoted by attributing to those workmen neither more nor less than their due; not giving that respect to ministers, which is his right alone, *whose ministers they are*; nor treating those as servants of the meanest quality, who, though servants, are yet of the first and most honourable rank; stewards, intrusted with a charge no less important than *the mysteries of God*; and, as such, accountable to their great Lord: that the thing they are properly accountable for is not skill and address, so much as fidelity and honesty; and as none but their Master hath authority to reckon with them, so none but he can be a competent judge how they have acquitted themselves in this respect: the reason is, because many things, the most material in an inquiry of that nature, are yet in the dark, and like to continue so till that time come, (and come it will,) when not only the actions of each man employed, but the true principles and ^hsecret views upon which he acted, shall be disclosed. This makes it reasonable for every one thus intrusted, to be content with referring himself and his proceedings to the justification and reward which every faithful servant shall then receive in the face of the whole world; and not to be extremely solicitous what others (who see things but imperfectly, who consider and censure them partially, and who have nothing to do to censure these matters at all) shall take upon them to say or think of his integrity in the mean while. This makes it necessary for men to suspend their judgments, and not pronounce too hastily of things and persons, which they have neither authority to judge, nor as yet sufficient matter in evidence to ground a just and peremptory sentence upon.

This is plainly the substance and design of the exhortation recommended to our thoughts in this day's Epistle; which would furnish me with several useful heads of discourse. For instance,

1. First, hence private Christians may learn in how honourable a character those men serve to whom the ⁱcare of their souls is committed; and what a defence this ought to be against that vilifying malice and contempt which proud and profligate people are so ready upon all occasions to let fly at them and their office. For since every employment of consequence derives a regard upon the person set in it, in proportion to the dignity of his Master, and his place, and the

usefulness of it (when regularly discharged) to the public good; *ministers of Christ* cannot be despised without an affront to their Master; and *stewards of the mysteries of God* cannot be made a public jest and scorn, without sinking the credit of religion and the gospel. We know who hath said, *“He that despiseth you despiseth me; and he that despiseth me despiseth him that sent me.”* And lest this should be thought a saying confined to the immediate apostles and disciples of our Lord then upon earth, he declares after his resurrection, that *“as his Father had sent him, so he sends them,”* i. e. the apostles and their successors, upon the same embassy, and with the same full powers: (all powers that were necessary for the establishment, the instruction, the discipline, the constant succession of the Christian church.) This extends the privileges of the ministerial function to as many as shall be called to it regularly while the world endures. And for such, who are guilty of offering indignities to them, though I judge them not, yet I ought to say, that it highly concerns them very seriously to examine and to judge themselves for all the injury and disesteem which, whether directly intended or not, is yet but too manifestly in fact and in event brought, by their means, not only upon a particular person or profession, but upon religion and good manners in general. And let such look well to it, whether their conscience can, or God be like to acquit them of being, if not *slanderers*, yet at least *hinderers* of his word and its success among men.

2. Secondly, St. Paul argues here, that the peculiar commendation of persons in this post is, their being *“found faithful”*; and that particularly, in bar to the encroachments of some who bore themselves high upon their boasted wit and eloquence, and lessened others who did not come as they did, with *“excellency of speech, and enticing words of man’s wisdom.”* To this purpose he tells the Corinthians, that art and ornament and great abilities are not the things for which spiritual stewards are properly accountable. These are talents bestowed by their Master as he sees fit; the proportions and the placing them out are entirely in his disposal. They to whom much is imparted must have much to answer for; but be it more or be it less that the steward is intrusted with, still his fidelity may be the same; and only so much shall be charged to his account as was committed to his management. The servant in the parable who had improved *“two talents,”* received the same praise, and a reward proportionable to his who had improved *five*. And reason good, since the same honest disposition which kept him faithful in the care of that little which was in his power, would likewise have secured his diligence and integrity in the care of more, if more had been in his power. And when the apostle argues, that therefore he and his fellow-labourers ought not to be censured or despised for their unaffected plainness of speech, or any other circumstances in the figure they made, which might to worldly men seem weak and despicable; the inference, I think, is very just, that poverty, unartful preaching, nay some degree of ignorance

itself, when not wilful, or occasioned by sloth and vice, is not always blamable in, or just ground of disregard to, persons of this character. There are many considerations which may render this a pitiable case, but not any that can make it a fit subject of mockery and mirth. And if God himself judge these *stewards of his mysteries*, not by the brightness of their parts, the sparkling beauties of their style, or the largeness of their acquired knowledge; but by their industry and honest care in using such abilities as they have (mean though they be) to his glory and service; it will ill become them whose servants they are not, to judge them upon these accounts. And much more irreligious and insolent yet it is to expose them upon any such pretensions to the derision of men, who are so glad of every occasion, and triumph so exceedingly in the diminution and disgrace of *them who labour among them and admonish them*, that they seem to practise the very reverse of the apostle's command, and instead of *esteeming them highly*, do rather think but the more meanly of, and pour spite and contumely upon them *for their work's sake*.

3. Thirdly, this description of the ministerial office is a seasonable warning to all who take it upon them, what demeanour is suitable to so weighty a charge, and how strict a reckoning they shall certainly be called to for it. For a stewardship is the highest trust and of greatest concern in the family, and therefore our Lord describes it by appointing the persons in it *rulers over their Lord's household, to give them meat in due season*. The direction of souls and distribution of spiritual sustenance are matters of mighty moment, such as require the nicest fidelity, the most laborious industry. The doing this in *due season*, that is, watching all favourable opportunities, accommodating oneself to the different exigencies and circumstances, the capacities and tempers of men, asks great prudence and serious application of thought. The consideration of acting in trust for another implies, that his advantage should be the chief and constant aim, that to which all endeavours must be directed, and by which all the man's measures must be governed. He who makes his own profit the end of his diligence in this affair, is an unfaithful steward, and follows not his master's business, but his own. The flock and not the fleece must be the shepherd's care. The nature of this office will not allow either waste or misemployment, turning to none, or turning to our private advantage, those goods, or that produce of them, which are entirely and of right our Master's; because the office is itself a trust, and every trust necessarily infers an account. Our Lord hath therefore told us beforehand what shall be that steward's fate, who either *smites his fellow-servants*, (behaves himself insolently in his place, stretches his just to a tyrannical power, and usurps upon the consciences of his people,) or *eats and drinks with the drunken*, (indulges himself in ease and luxury, profuseness and riot,) that such a one's *lord will cut him asunder, and appoint him his portion with hypocrites, in a place of weeping and gnashing of teeth*.

And sure if any sort of wickedness heat some men's furnace seven times hotter than others, it must be theirs who live disorderly in that profession which devotes them to the more immediate service of God and goodness: who abuse the most important confidence that can possibly be reposed in man; who draw scandal upon their order and religion, by becoming ringleaders in vice, instead of patterns in piety and virtue; who countenance irreligion and unbelief, by ministering just suspicions of their preaching merely for a trade; and, in compliance with interest and form, laying restraints and yokes upon others, which themselves refuse to submit to in their own conversation.

4. Fourthly, though the ministers of Christ are *stewards* more immediately and eminently, yet every man is truly such in what capacity or condition of life soever providence have placed him. All are not *stewards of the mysteries of God* indeed, as these men are; but this only argues a difference in the talents, not a freedom from trust. For some talent or other is committed to every man, and such as he shall most assuredly be reckoned with for the mismanagement of. But of this I shall have a fitter occasion to treat hereafter, and therefore only put my reader in mind of it now, to quicken his care by this short mention here.

5. Fifthly, the judgment which St. Paul professes himself so little concerned for, and dissuades others from the exercise of, is not any public and legal one, which persons in authority, whether ecclesiastical or civil, will pass upon notorious offences. This is what *the ministers of Christ*, as well as others, are bound to submit and pay great deference to. But it is a judgment of private persons, supported by no authority; a judgment of partiality and affection, which meddles where it hath nothing to do, and tends unduly to exalt or depress teachers in the opinion of the world. And in bar to this, he offers two unanswerable arguments: the one implied in their being *ministers of Christ*, accountable to none but their own Master; who will judge all their actions one day immediately by himself, and in the meanwhile judges such as are of human cognizance, by those who are deputed to act under him in an authoritative way: consequently when private persons take upon them to censure and condemn such, they incur the guilt of "*judging another man's servant*", which nobody hath any just warrant to do. The other consists in this, that these men neither have nor can have sufficient proof to form a right judgment upon; because they cannot see into their teacher's conscience, and so, not being able to take a full and distinct view of the principles he goes upon, must needs be liable to great injustice and many mistakes, as oft as they shall presume to pass a verdict upon what they see, the equity whereof will depend upon somewhat which as yet they cannot see. But it is not designed, that matters should for ever lie thus in the dark; for he, whose proper business it is to judge, will take a time to lay all open, and bring the most secret

things and intentions to light. And this declaration, that such a discovery shall certainly be made, being, in my apprehension, one great motive which induced our church to make this Scripture a part of the Advent service; I think myself obliged, in compliance with the design of this solemn season, to employ the remainder of my discourse upon it. And therefore I will endeavour,

I. First, to shew, that the general judgment shall extend, not only to men's overt, but even their most secret acts, nay to the very thoughts and intentions of their hearts: and then,

II. Secondly, to make some practical inferences from this doctrine; such more particularly as the apostle hath led me to in the passage now before us.

I only think it necessary to premise, that, whereas the occasion of St. Paul's discourse engaged him only in that part of the argument which concerns the support good men may find from it, when suffering under false surmises and unworthy aspersions; I shall speak to this point in its utmost latitude, and represent the terror it ought to be to wicked men and hypocrites, who, when their hearts are sifted and laid open, shall as certainly have punishment and condemnation, as the faithful **shall have reward and praise of God.*

I. First, then I say, the general judgment at the last day will not rest in overt acts only, but reach to those which now lie most concealed, even to the thoughts and intentions of men's hearts. That thus we shall all be dealt with, the Scripture is express: the preacher acquaints us, *that God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good or whether it be evil.* And St. Paul, besides the place now under consideration, hath another to the Romans, where, making mention of the day of judgment, he styles it, *the day when God shall judge the secrets of men's hearts by Jesus Christ.* Hence David begs God to cleanse him from his *secret faults.* Why, but because these as well as open ones, if not forgiven, will certainly be punished? Hence our Lord forbids his disciples to affect pomp and show in their alms and prayers and fastings, for this very substantial reason, that no good work of any kind is lost by the privacy of it: but even when these things are done *in secret, our Father which seeth in secret himself shall reward them openly.* And indeed, though the Scripture had not declared thus much, yet the assurance of a general judgment sufficiently implies it; and we might upon very good grounds conclude, that so it must needs be, from the reason and nature of the thing.

For the end and business of this judgment is positively said to be, *that every man may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad.* But now such a distribution cannot be regularly made, except the *hidden things of darkness be brought to light, and even the counsels of men's hearts* charged in account to them, and that for these two following reasons:

I. First, because the seeds of all wickedness spring up in the

^x Ver. 5.

^y Eccles. xii. 14.

^z Rom. ii. 16.

^a Psalm xix. 12.

^b Matt. vi. 4, 6, 18.

^c 2 Cor. v. 10.

heart. It is conceived and born and bred there; and the breaking out into act is only the perfecting of that, which is come to maturity, by being carried on and cherished in thought and intention. St. James hath described the whole process of this monstrous birth in that memorable text, *"Every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lusts, and enticed. Then lust, when it hath conceived, bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death."* And our Saviour's argument, that the things which defile a man are not they which enter into him, but those which come forth of him, proceeds in this manner: *"Out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies: these are the things which defile a man."* Hence we are so often called upon to *"purify our hearts, as well as to cleanse our hands; to crucify, not our flesh only, and bring our body into subjection, but our affections and desires too."* Because while the fountain is tainted, the streams issuing from it must of necessity be foul and bitter; and therefore our Saviour's reproof to the Pharisees, who blasphemed his miracles, is levelled at this inward corruption: *"O generation of vipers, how can ye, being evil, speak good things? for out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh. A good man out of the good treasure of the heart bringeth forth good things; and an evil man out of the evil treasure bringeth forth evil things."*

2. Secondly, the formal difference of moral good and evil depends precisely upon the design and intention with which the thing is done. If this be bad, no other consideration can make the action good; and though any defect render an action bad in itself, yet none, with which the will is not in some degree chargeable, shall make it imputed as bad to the doer. So that the same act in appearance, when proceeding upon different prospects, and springing from different principles, as to its moral consideration, is by no means the same. Thus one man may give alms out of charity, and another may give out of ostentation; one may pray from real devotion to God, and another may do it to be seen of men; one may fast for mortification, and another may fast to acquire the character of an extraordinary abstemious and sanctified person. Both give and fast and pray; but because not both upon the same motive, therefore not both with the same acceptance and success. He who does any of these upon a worldly principle, *"hath, our Lord tells us, his reward already."* He did it to be seen, and seen he is. This is the coin in which he desired to be paid, and therefore he hath no claim to any wages besides. But they who do these things out of pure conscience, and to approve their love and obedience to God, have an ample compensation in reserve, and shall not be losers at last, though no present profit be paid them down in hand. Now the reason why the nature of virtue and vice, and the award of every man's recompense should turn upon this point, is very obvious, because the power of doing well or ill is not always in our own disposal, but the will to do either can never be

^d James i. 14, 15.

^e Matt. xv. 19, 20.

^f James iv. 8.

^g 1 Cor. ix. 27; Gal. v. 24.

^h Matt. xii. 34, 35.

ⁱ Matt. vi. 1, 2, 4, 5, 6, 16, 18.

out of it; and therefore this is what we must look to, and are strictly answerable for. He that would do ill, but wants means or opportunity, contracts the same guilt as if the thing had been actually committed, because his mind approves and consents to the sin; and thus the man *who looks upon a woman to lust after her*, is said to have committed adultery with her already in his heart. He that hath a sincere desire and disposition to do good, but cannot, hath all the merit which those desires when fully effected could give him. And thus the *poor widow's* two mites are interpreted a liberality far exceeding the gifts of those rich men, who *out of their abundance cast in much* to the offerings of God. The reason of which, alleged in a like case by St. Paul, will hold equally applicable to good works of any kind whatsoever; that, *if there be first a willing mind, it is accepted, according to that a man hath, and not according to that he hath not.*

That thus it is, the rules of equity and justice among men make it plain; for even earthly judicatures measure the fact by the intention, and acquit or punish the person accordingly. Killing a man is the same act, simply and abstractedly considered, whether it be done by chance, or in one's own defence, or with malicious purpose: but yet the law looks and animadverts upon it differently with regard to the mind and intent wherewith the thing is done. In the first case it is reputed pitiable and innocent; in the second, excusable, so far as to mitigate the punishment; in the last, capital, and such as ought to exclude from all mercy. Now the only reason why nothing but words and actions are tried and punished here below is, because the thoughts and imaginations of men's hearts are what we cannot come at the knowledge of any farther than words and actions let us into the discovery of them. But this reason is of no force in the proceedings of the last and general judgment: there we have to do with *one, before whom all things are naked and open, a discernor of thoughts, a searcher of hearts, and an understander of our first motions and imaginations.* Herein consists the perfect righteousness of God's judgment, that no one innocent man shall suffer, no one guilty shall be there discharged; no evasion shall be left for the closest and most cunning vice, no recompense lost to the most obscure and unobserved virtue. And, since the universal knowledge of this Judge qualifies him for doing right to all, his justice will vindicate itself in weighing and detecting those secret springs upon which the very nature of a good or evil action principally turns. And we need not be told that men are deservedly reputed good or evil, not according to the face and outward appearance of their actions, but by the inward bent and *counsels of their hearts.*

II. I come now to draw some practical inferences from this point, such in particular as the apostle hath improved it to in the passage at present before us.

And first, this, as hath been often urged already, should make us

^k Matt. v. 28.

^l Mark xli. 41—44.

^m 2 Cor. viii. 12.

ⁿ Heb. iv. 12; 1 Chron. xxviii. 9; Psalm cxxxix. 1; 1 Thess. ii. 4.

very sparing and tender in our censures of other men's behaviour; because in such cases we often pass sentence without so much as the possibility of a sufficient proof. What they do we may know, but whence, and why they do it, we shall never know perfectly, till the secrets of all hearts shall be revealed. And, since the same act hath been shewed to vary, according to those unseen springs, where the motion first began; if we will be clean from injustice, our judgment must be suspended till those too are brought into open view. In the mean while charity obliges us to allow every thing the most favourable construction it can fairly bear; to abate for involuntary ignorance, for inadvertencies and indiscretions, for want of opportunity to do better, for the many unavoidable hindrances and unforeseen accidents which may defeat the best intentions, and render the man quite another person from what we apprehend him. For, as St. James observes, *to him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is a sin*; to one, that is, who can, but will not do it. And it happens very commonly that those proceedings are severely condemned in our brethren, which yet would be our own were their circumstances and difficulties ours. So that the suspending our definitive sentence, and forbearing to fix odious characters upon men, is no more than the constant rule of equity directs in all cases. Not to pass judgment, I mean, beyond what the matter in evidence will bear us out in.

But, secondly, if this consideration will not, as, alas! there is but little appearance that it should, check the licentious tongues and wicked thoughts of consorions and over-busy men; yet it may at least be serviceable to the support and satisfaction of good people, who are struck at by their slanders. For this gives such a certain prospect of having their integrity cleared, and those virtues, which are so much envied and traduced, proclaimed to all the world; that no one good action, how vilely soever misrepresented in the mean while, shall then lose its just commendation or reward; and those false tongues, so industrious to lessen or blacken them, shall be covered with their own confusion, and found liars before God and all mankind. So bright, so triumphant, shall innocence and an honest mind shine at that day; so much more public shall its praise be then, than all the aspersions which the most laborious ill nature can cast upon it here: but especially so much more valuable is that praise, because bestowed by him who cannot err in judgment, and whose acceptance it is our duty to aim at and prefer before the applauses of the whole world. This made it in St. Paul's account *pro very small a thing to be judged of men*, because men's judgment is not the issue we must stand or fall by. And therefore every one, who makes it his business to discharge a good conscience, may and ought to bear up against any offence or misconstructions that shall come from that quarter; as remembering that he seeks not to please men, but God. And though the esteem of men be valuable in due place and proportion, yet if men will not be satisfied with that which is just and right, well done or

well intended ; God will receive it kindly, reward it bountifully, and effectually expose their malice, and rectify their mistakes, who thought and spoke amiss of things that deserved a better treatment and more candid interpretation. So true is that in point of reputation too, which St. Peter speaks of other (but scarce more sensible) evils of persecution, *‘If ye suffer for righteousness’ sake, happy are ye ; and be not afraid of their terror, neither be troubled : i. e. be not discouraged from persevering even in that good for which ye suffer wrongfully ; but sanctify the Lord God in your hearts : i. e. shew that ye do it for his sake, and are well content with his, his single approbation, though all the world should defame and condemn you.*

3. Thirdly, what a mortifying reflection ought this to be to all ungodly men and hypocrites, that there is a day coming when all their lurking corruptions shall be brought out into the open light, all their cunning disguises pulled off ; and even those sins, in which they most affected secrecy, laid bare, displayed in their blackest colours, and published in the hearing of all mankind ! Oh ! what a world of falsehood and treachery, of dissimulation and craft, will then appear plainly ! What treasons and murders, what perverting of laws and justice, what adulteries and lasciviousness, what abominations and deeds of darkness and horror, will then cover the faces of them who have imposed upon their easy or their charitable brethren, to see their long successful artifices detected, their counterfeit zeal for God and the public good, their specious pretences of right and religion, which have been taken up purely to serve their ambition or vainglory, to pursue a private interest, or execute designs of baseness and malice and villainy ! What a check should this be to them who indulge themselves in secret sins, to think that their closets and their beds, the thickest walls and the darkest nights cannot shut out that *eye ‘which is in every place, and to which the darkness and light are both alike !* How vain, how senseless is it to be awed with the fear of men, and not to consider that public infamy and contempt, which shall be poured upon them when their most scandalous practices shall be brought forth, and no contrivance left to hide or varnish them over ! Consider this, thou poor deluded sinner : and if thou wouldest blush, and even die with shame, to have thy own family or neighbourhood, nay, but a servant or a child witness to thy hidden works of dishonesty ; hold thy hand, man, and flatter not thyself with a false imagination that these shall always lie hid ; but be assured thy God, thy Judge, discerns them at the very instant of acting ; and that acquaintance and strangers, friends and enemies, all the men that ever did, and all that ever shall live upon earth, will certainly one day partake in their discovery. What a warning should this be to every one of us, not only to govern our actions, and to set a watch upon our words, but even to keep a strict and constant guard upon our thoughts, to cherish no malice or envy, no injustice or uncleanness, even there ; to practise no manner of dissimulation or double-dealing with either God

or man; since the secrets of every kind are sure to be disclosed, every heart to be weighed in the balance, and sifted to the very bottom; and nothing will abide the strictness of that test, but undissembled holiness and perfect sincerity! In a word, whatsoever it be that we would not do or say or think, were our souls transparent, were all the world to stand by and look on, were they that wish us worst to examine every corner of our hearts, and report what they find there; all that, the Scripture now before us produces an undeniable reason why we should not allow ourselves in. For it assures us, that, how close soever we may cover, or how cunningly soever we may carry our wickedness at present, all will be sure to come out at last, to our eternal punishment and indelible reproach. There are but very few, I fear, of so clear a character, that they would be content other people, perhaps that their best friends, should know as much of them in all particulars as they know of themselves: and yet all this, and a great deal more, is perfectly known already, and shall be known to all mankind at the day of judgment. Which leads me to the last thing I intend to infer from this discourse of St. Paul at present; and that is,

4. Fourthly, humility and a holy jealousy over ourselves, necessary even for the best men. For to this reflection that declaration leads us, *'Yea, I judge not my own self. For I know nothing by myself; yet am I not hereby justified: but he that judgeth me is the Lord.* Had these words fallen from some careless pen, one who soothed himself up in a false security, and took no pains to search into things which, when found and known, were like to give him trouble; they had not deserved our so particular regard. For many such there are, who in affliction, upon sick beds, or other solemn seasons of examination and repentance, *know nothing by themselves*, and are much exalted with the quiet and clearness of their conscience; when yet their faults and failings have been so numerous, so notorious, that every impartial stander-by can show them to themselves, of a complexion far different from that with which their own false glasses flatter them. But when a person so circumspect in his conduct, so zealous in his ministry, so severe a searcher of his conscience, as St. Paul, supported too by so clear a testimony, did not yet dare to rely upon this issue, but appeals to a higher and more discerning Judge; how shall any, how the best and most wary of us, presume to answer our hearts before that tribunal? It is true, as St. John says, *'if our hearts condemn us not, then have we confidence towards God.* But it is as true, which St. John reminds us of at the same time, *that God is greater than our hearts, and knoweth all things.* If our conscience condemn us, we may be sure God will do so too, because we cannot know more of ourselves than he knows of us. But if that condemn us not, it will not follow from hence that we have nothing which deserves to be condemned, because God knows more of us than we know of ourselves. The peace of conscience, which arises from a due inquiry and a comfortable answer concerning the state of our souls, may be allowed indeed to

give us confidence, that is, a good degree of hope and trust, that God will accept our sincerity, and overlook many things for the sake of his Son, and in consideration of our hearty desire to do better, and our constant care never wilfully to do any thing amiss. But can we be confident too that we have not really done any thing amiss? No, God help us, no such matter. Alas! how many opportunities of doing good have been slipped and neglected, even by them who are watchful not to do evil? And yet for sins of omission only, not for doing evil, but for not doing good it is, that we read *"the goats on the left hand are sentenced to everlasting punishment."* The unprofitable servant was cast into *"utter darkness"* for not improving his talent, and do not we usually account it a great commendation not to have wasted or grossly misemployed ours? How few are so nice as to be reproached by their own breasts, for the time lost in impertinent formalities and innocent diversions; for the wealth spent in superfluity and pomp, and any delights not directly sinful; for the study and wit employed upon useless curiosities, and (to say the best and gentlest thing of it) such as tend to adorn, but not at all to amend the man? But farther yet, allowing a conduct prudent and unblamable even in these matters; who is he that hath not multitudes of faults committed in passion and surpriso, never attended to when they were committed; and more, which he did attend to, but through prejudice or mistake considered them as no faults; and more still, which when done and stinging him with remorse, he poured false balm into the wound, and skinned over the sore with partial extenuations; and most of all, which he knew to be faults, and for a while was touched with sorrow for them, but hath now absolutely forgotten them, as if they had never been? Now of all these there is a faithful register in heaven, a full and critical account, where every fact is entered, its quality truly stated, each of its aggravating circumstances charged down to us, not one overlooked, not one misrepresented. And to persons mindful of this, it cannot, I think, seem strange, that St. Paul does not insist upon the testimony of his own breast for the final issue, upon which the great reckoning was to be adjusted. This, it is true, was his *"rejoicing,"* as he professes upon another occasion, because it argued his *sincerity*; but yet he laid not so great stress upon it, as from thence to insist upon his justification. Because sincerity is far short of innocence; *"and they who say they have no sin, deceive themselves, and the truth is not in them."* And if the case stood thus with so eminent an apostle, well-sure may we lay our mouths in the dust, and cry out with David, *"If thou, Lord, shouldest be extreme, to mark what is done amiss, O Lord, who may abide it? But there is mercy with thee, therefore shalt thou be feared."* And indeed herein lies the inestimable comfort and advantage of an honest and peaceful mind, that it entitles us to mercy. But still mercy is our last, our only refuge: for by a judgment without mercy no flesh living, not the most holy, not the most circumspect, can be justified.

^u Matth. xiv. 41, 42, 43.

^v 1 John i. 8.

^x Matth. xxv. 26-30.

^z Psalm cxxx. 3, 4.

^x 2 Cor. i. 12.

And therefore the brightest virtue sets no man above humble and awful apprehensions of this dread tribunal; because the brightest virtue is but human virtue; and all human virtue must be debased with a great allay of frailty and manifold imperfections; such as hath nothing to boast of, nothing to claim as a strict and adequate reward; but much, very much, to ask forgiveness for, and a kind construction of, at the hands of Almighty God. Happy then are they, and they only, who, in that last and most important juncture, shall be *found in Jesus Christ, not having their own righteousness which is of works, but that righteousness which is of God by faith*; such I mean as trusts not in its own weak and unworthy performances, but relies entirely on the merits and mediation of him, who is not only our Judge, but our Saviour, our peace and our propitiation. To whom, with the Father and the Holy Ghost, three persons and one God, be all honour and glory for ever. Amen.

THE GOSPEL. Matth. xi. 2.

2 *Now when John had heard in the prison the works of Christ, he sent two of his disciples,* 2. John Baptist, being now imprisoned by Herod, and the public exercise of his ministry at an end, as his life was shortly to be; that his disciples might be turned over to a better master, in whom they were not yet fully satisfied;

3 *And said unto him, Art thou he that should come, or do we look for another?* 3. He sends them, upon the report of Christ's miracles, to ask Jesus whether he were the Messiah, that eminent person, who, for the frequent prophecies and general expectation of his approach, was styled, *He that should come*.

4 *Jesus answered and said unto them, Go and shew John again those things which ye do hear and see:* 4, 5. To this our Lord returned no direct answer, but only bade them observe and relate faithfully the miracles they have now seen as well as heard, and compare the prophecies concerning the

5 *The blind receive their sight, and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, and the poor have the gospel preached to them.* 5. The Messiah with his actions, which would be sufficient direction for forming a right judgment of this matter. Among these distinguishing characters, one is, that the poor should be particularly addressed to by Christ, and receive his doctrines with great readiness and success.

6 *And blessed is he, whosoever shall not be offended in me.* 6. Another, that great offence would be taken at him. But they were the happy men, who suffered no worldly respects, no meanness in his appearance, to prejudice them against the belief and practice of what he taught.

7 *And as they departed, Jesus began to say unto the multitudes concerning John,* 7. When these disciples of John were dismissed, our

What went ye out into the wilderness to see? A reed shaken with the wind? Lord speaks very glorious things in his commendation, that this person whom the people went into the wilderness to visit, was not like a reed shaken with the wind, a man fickle and inconstant in his principles.

8 *But what went ye out for to see? A man clothed in soft raiment? behold, they that wear soft clothing are in kings' houses.* 8. Nor of gayety and outward pomp, but one of singular austerity;

9 *But what went ye out for to see? A prophet? yea, I say unto you, and more than a prophet.* 9. And above the rate of common prophets, as seeing that Messias, and personally shewing him to the world, whom the rest only foresaw and foretold at a distance.

10 *For this is he, of whom it is written, Behold, I send my messenger before thy face, which shall prepare thy way before thee.* 10. And not only so, but himself a subject of their prophecies, particularly that noted one of Malachi, who describes him, as the harbinger and immediate forerunner of God coming in the flesh, to visit his temple at Jerusalem, and by his baptism and doctrine of repentance, fitting men for the reception of Christ.

COMMENT.

In explaining this Gospel, three things especially deserve our attention:

I. First, the design of the message.

II. Secondly, the method our blessed Lord takes to satisfy that inquiry, whether he were the true Messias.

III. Thirdly, the testimony he gives here to the Baptist.

I. I begin with the design of this message; which we are told was sent by John, when a prisoner, and occasioned by that relation, which his disciples had made to him, of our Lord's growing fame and great miracles. Now these are very significant circumstances, and such as give a considerable light into the matter now under examination^b.

The Scriptures upon all occasions acquaint us, that the Baptist, through the whole course of his ministry, had borne constant and ample testimony to the blessed Jesus; that he exhorted them who came to him, to rest their faith not on himself, but on him *that should come after him*: that he disclaimed all pretensions to his own being the Messias, even before he had seen and known him that was so; that he afterwards received an express and undoubted revelation, declaring which that person was, by a visible descent of the Holy Spirit, and a voice from heaven at our Lord's baptism; that he made it his business, both in public and private, to dispose the Jews in general, and his own disciples in particular, to believe and reverence and obey

^b Luke vii. 18, 19.

^c Acts xix. 4; John i. 25, 32, 33; Matth. iii. 16, 17; Luke iii. 21, 22; John i. 29, 30, 32, 34; iii. 24-28, &c.

Jesus. All this was done before his imprisonment. And we shall offer great injury to the character of that excellent person in supposing his constancy so shaken, or his opinion and behaviour so inconsistent with themselves, as, after such irrefragable evidence, such open and solemn declarations of his faith, to admit any doubt, whether this were *he that should come*, the long promised, the universally expected Messias, or whether men were still *to look for another*, in whom these promises and expectations should receive their due and desired accomplishments.

Some indeed have thought, that the importance of this question was, whether Jesus should die for the redemption of mankind. But surely he who long before had styled him *the Lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world*, and in all likelihood chose to express himself so with allusion to the sacrifices slain under the Jewish law, gives sufficient intimation that he was not ignorant of this great truth. And for that other pretence, of St. John's desiring to know whether he should come to the *place of souls departed*, and preach salvation to them, this may be justly looked upon as an imagination so extravagant, so very foreign to the matter in hand, as not to deserve a particular consideration.

From hence, I think, we may fairly conclude, that the Baptist did not send this message with a design to satisfy any scruples of his own, but purely for the sake and conviction of them who brought it: to set them right in their notions, and confirm them in the belief of Jesus; and so turn them over to their proper and better Master, now that himself was upon the point of leaving the world. And this was the more necessary, because their intemperate zeal and partial respect for John had hitherto made them averse to Jesus, and envious at his honour and miracles. What had been discoursed to them formerly upon this subject having therefore had but little effect, John, in compassion to their infirmity, condescends to have their scruples propounded in his own name. And as this address of the Baptist is remarkable, in providing so tenderly for his disciples' better information; so is that of our Lord no less, in his manner of giving it. Which leads me to the

II. Second thing. The method made choice of to satisfy that inquiry, whether Jesus were the true Messias. As all that John had said in commendation of Jesus might pass with disciples thus prepossessed for an effect of his humility and great modesty; so any direct answer which Jesus had made to this question might have been eluded by the objection made elsewhere by the Jews, *'Thou bearest record of thyself, thy record is not true.'* And therefore he refers them to another sort of evidence—that of miracles and prophecies. And, desiring only a faithful report of what themselves saw and heard, leaves them to their own Master for the conclusions to be drawn from thence. So that the argument in short lies thus: Such and such things are laid down by the prophets for certain marks and charac-

^d John i. 29, 34.

^e Τοῦτο δὲ ἐνέφατον. Theoph. in loc.

^f John viii. 13.

ters by which the Messiah may be known at his coming; the disciples of John had ocular demonstration of these marks agreeing to Jesus; therefore they ought most assuredly to believe that Jesus was *he that should come*, and that, after such evidence of his being so, they were not to look for another. Now in order to our discerning the force of this argument I shall consider it in both its parts. And first, concerning miracles, I will shew,

1. First, what evidence miracles in general are that the person working them is a teacher sent by God.

2. Secondly, how our Saviour's miracles in particular proved him to be that eminent Teacher distinguished by the title of Messiah, or *he that should come*.

1. The former of these inquiries shall be fully spoken to hereafter, and is the less necessary here, because, though the alleging of miracles in general was a good proof to John's disciples, so far as it went, yet this alone did not reach the point in question. It proved Jesus to come from God, but many others had come from God too, and had given the evidence of miracles that they did so. But the main difficulty lies yet behind; the other prophets came indeed, but not any of them was *he that should come*, so as to discharge men from looking for another; and therefore this necessarily engages us in the

2. Second inquiry. How those particular miracles wrought by Jesus prove him, and no other, to be the true Messiah. This is the Prophet foretold by Moses, in whom every soul that believed not was threatened with utter destruction^b. And, since he was to be received with a deference superior to any prophet besides, it is but reasonable to expect some marks, by attending to which, men might be delivered from the danger of mistaking any prophet besides for the Messiah. Again, since miracles were the proof of coming from God common to all that brought any new revelation, and none but he came so as that men were not to look for another; it is necessary that his miracles should have some peculiar characters, whereby the person doing these might be known to be the Messiah, and distinguished from any other person who should do miracles, and yet was not the Messiah. And, not to insist at present upon any considerations but what the passage now in hand gives fair intimation of, there are, I think, two things observable in our blessed Saviour's miracles which cannot be attributed to those of any other's, and both of them acknowledged to be distinctions of the Messiah from any meaner prophet. And they are,

1. The number of them. That the Messiah should excel all that ever went before him in this respect appears to have been the constant opinion of the Jews. Whence some, we find, vindicate their going over to him with that argument: *Many of the people believed on him, and said, When Christ cometh, will he do more miracles than these which this man hath done?* And hence our Lord seems to charge his

^a Gospel for second Sunday after Epiphany.

^b Deut. xviii. 15; Acts iii. 22.

^c John vii. 31.

enemies with perverseness, and a peevish malice ; on terms that admit their incredulity to have had some excuse, in case any teacher besides had given equal demonstration of a divine commission : *“ If I had not done among them (says he) the works which no other man did, they had not had sin ; but now have they both seen and hated both me and my Father.*

2. Their quality. By which I mean, not only that Christ's miracles were, in regard to the beholders, and in common estimation at least, greater, more stupendous demonstrations of a Divine power, than those exhibited by any other prophet ; but also, that they were such, as the doing of had many ages before been foretold for an infallible sign to distinguish the Messiah by. Those in particular mentioned in this Gospel are singled out as such by Isaiah, who describes the happy state of Christ's kingdom by benefits which were never fully and literally accomplished in any other person : for, though some of the prophets might, upon very important occasions, be enabled to work one or a few such miracles ; yet to make it a general practice in all kinds, at all places and times, was so peculiar to Jesus, as to be an incommunicable property, and uncontestable argument of his being the Christ.

But there is somewhat more yet which I would say upon this occasion ; it is, that these miracles were exceedingly well chosen, to characterise the Messiah, in regard of their suitableness to the design of his coming. The Law was enacted with a very terrible pomp, such as spoke it to be, what indeed it was, a dispensation of servitude and great severity. But the Gospel is a covenant of reconciliation and peace, of friendship, nay, of sonship with God ; intended, not so much to strike an awe upon men's minds, as to charm and win them over with all the endearing methods of gentleness and love. And therefore the wonders that bore testimony to its truth were works of mercy and pity. And the kind relief they brought to the bodies resembled the infinite compassion and tender regard which this Messiah expressed for the souls of men. The ancient prophets proved their commission by acts of divine vengeance and sore plagues, as well as by cures and corporal deliverances : *“ but our Lord went about always doing good ; rescuing wretched creatures from the tyranny and possession of evil spirits ; healing diseases and infirmities, but inflicting none ; releasing from death, but never hastening it ; insomuch that, throughout the whole course of our Saviour's ministry, we have not any one instance of his power demonstrated in the suffering or harm even of his bitterest enemies : and thus the argument is uncontestable with regard to these disciples, who came to propound this question. For if the Messiah were to signalize himself by miracles, then John (for whose honour they were so zealously concerned) could not possibly be that person ; because it is expressly said, that *“ John did no miracle : and if the Messiah were to be known by some particular sorts of miracles, then Jesus must of necessity be that person ; be-**

^k John xv. 24.

^l Acts x. 38.

^m John x. 41.

cause the miracles, foretold to be wrought by the Messiah, were done by Jesus, and had been done by no other person whatsoever.

2. The other branch of this testimony consists in the agreement of our Lord's behaviour, and the resentments of men in regard to it, with what had been foretold concerning the Messiah.

The former in those words, *"The poor have the Gospel preached unto them."* A passage taken out of Isaiah, and applied by Jesus to himself, in his famous sermon at Nazareth. And though not strictly a miracle, yet considerable enough to be made a distinction of Christ, who was in this respect singular: as addressing himself chiefly to people of low degree, whom the Jewish doctors held in such contempt, that it was looked upon as a reasonable ground of reproach to them who believed his doctrine, that they were men of no figure in the world. *"Have any of the Pharisees or of the rulers believed on him? But this people who knoweth not the law are cursed."* And also the predictions concerning the Gospel, and the entertainment it should find, speak of it as a system accommodated to men of humble spirits; and that its success should be most remarkable among the contrite, the meek, and those who were most disinterested and resigned, and mortified to the vanities and advantages of the present world.

The latter of these instances relates to the offence which should be taken at the Messiah, to the great danger and unhappiness of them who took it. And this was likewise very proper to be mentioned, both with regard to those disciples in particular, whose partiality to their Master gave them a concern in this warning; and in general, to remove that too common hinderance of believing in Jesus, which proceeded from his being despised or rejected of men. Whereas it appears from the characters given of him in the Old Testament, that this was so far from being a just objection against Jesus being the Christ, as to render it impossible for any one to have been so who did not meet with such opposition and contumelious treatment.

Thus I have done with my second head, and shall say but little to my

III. Third, the testimony given by our Lord to the Baptist. I have already, in my paraphrase, observed, that he is supposed to commend John for his firmness and constancy of mind, in opposing him to a *reed shaken with the wind*; for his austerity and strictness of life, in opposition to a *man clothed in soft raiment*; and to declare him not only a prophet, but more than a prophet, in regard of his having the privilege of shewing the Messiah to the people personally and present, whom the rest only foresaw at a great distance; and being so considerable, as himself to furnish matter for a prophecy, as the immediate harbinger of God incarnate.

All I shall add upon this matter is only a remark of the great goodness and prudence of our blessed Lord in the timing and adapting this commendation to the present circumstances and advantage of

ⁿ Isa. lxi. 1; Luke iv. 18, 21.

^o John vii. 48, 49.

^p Psalm xxv. 8, 9, 14; Isa. lvii. 15; lxvi. 2, 5.

^q Isa. viii. 14; xxviii. 16; Psalm cxviii. 22; 1 Pet. ii. 6, 7, 8; Isa. liii. 2, 3.

John. He forbears saying any thing in his praise 'till his disciples were gone, to avoid the imputation of flattery, or of any indirect methods to insinuate himself into their affections and good esteem. He justifies his constancy, when the question just before propounded might minister some suspicion, that his sufferings had wrought some change in him, and filled him with doubts, by no means consistent with the declarations he had so freely and ^{publicly} made heretofore, concerning Jesus being the very Christ. He applauds his austerity to them who admired it formerly, but had heard it cavilled at by the governing party. And he sets him above any of the prophets when in prison and ready to be sacrificed, to prevent that too common fault of measuring men's deserts by their fortune in the world, and to shew that in the lowest decline of oppression and disgrace he was in no degree less worthy of veneration, than when in his highest glory, and surrounded with proselytes and admirers, upon the banks of Jordan, and heard by Herod with the greatest reverence and delight.

Thus much shall serve for the heads I propounded to treat of. I will now just mention some few inferences, very easy and very fit to be deduced from them, and so conclude this discourse. And,

1. First, this question from John's disciples, and their continuing still doubtful and dissatisfied about a truth which he had taken such pains to bring them over to, ought to make us sensible, how great an advantage it is to sound belief and a good life to keep our minds free and open to the force of reason and religion; and how fatal an obstruction to both, when they are darkened and barred up by interest or prejudice, by partial affection, and having men's persons in admiration. In such cases, the clearest light and the strongest arguments will not serve to gain access. Since it may, with some little change, be observed of very many so blinded and biassed, which we plainly find to be true of these inquiries here before us; they will not believe Jesus to be the Christ, because determined already not to allow him greater than John. The application is easy to any undue sort of prepossessions, whether for or against persons or things; and I charge my reader with the making it sincerely, so far as he finds himself (and I fear there are but few, in comparison, who may not upon strict examination find themselves more or less) concerned in it.

2. Secondly, from the method taken to satisfy this doubt, we may observe what sort of evidence the Christian religion stands upon—Miracles, done frequently, publicly, before unbelievers, before enemies, men who could not deny, and yet would have been glad with all their hearts to find any flaw in them, any shelter for their infidelity. These carried in them a sufficient conviction; but to whom? To all who would attend to them, who would compare prophecies and events, and acknowledge him for the Messiah in whom those two concurred. But even these did not pretend to bear down prejudice and passion, peevish and resolute perverseness. Blessed are they that are not offended, because they submit to that proof which Almighty God hath given of

his truth, and are content to hearken to reason, in despite of all the solicitations of the world and corrupt nature to the contrary. But still *offended* many will be. Religion will always be spoken against; and the rock on which our hopes are built will continue *'a stone of stumbling to the unbelieving and disobedient'*. And, since we have fair warning that thus it will be, this ought not to dissettle us in our principles, but rather to confirm us in the belief of a Gospel whose truth is manifest even in this particular too; it should awaken our care and circumspection, that, while so many are ready to despise and take offence at Christ and his word, we be not found among them that contribute to or give just occasion for it. No, rather let us labour by a more vigorous zeal for God, and unwearied perseverance in well-doing, to put to silence the ignorance and malice of foolish and gainsaying men.

3. Thirdly, it may not be unseasonable upon this occasion to observe the season proper for miracles. They are necessary to establish new doctrines and to convert unbelievers; but, when alleged for doctrines sufficiently established already; when wrought or boasted of, only among people already possessed with a belief of the points they are made to countenance; when in a manner that seems to fear the being observed, or detected rather, by those of a contrary persuasion, they are then quite out of proper time and place, and do not create faith so much as suspicion of fraud. Our Lord proved the force of his miracles by showing their agreement with the predictions, that such should be wrought by the Messias; but the same Lord hath warned us, that in *'the last days there shall be lying wonders'*, and therefore we have reason to believe that the pretended workers of them in those days are *false prophets and false Christs*. So great a difference there is between the miracles of Christ, which were foretold on purpose that men might believe and be saved by them, and those wonders of a more modern date, which were foretold on purpose that men might not believe and be seduced by them.

4. Lastly, when St. John Baptist here is said to *prepare the way of the Lord before him*, we should do well to recollect wherein that preparation consisted. And every one in his station, but especially the ministers of the Gospel, who are messengers sent express upon this errand, should be careful to make ready the way to his second, as that harbinger did for his first coming; for the preparations are in both cases the same; making guilty people sensible of their sins, reproving open wickedness, unmasking hypocrisy, beating down spiritual pride; importuning men to repentance; by representing, with a faithful zeal, the horrible mischiefs and dreadful conclusion of a wicked course of life, and the terrors of that Master, who, at his coming to purge the floor, will not fail to separate most nicely between the wheat and the chaff, and burn the latter with unquenchable fire. We shall do well to take the Baptist for an example of our conduct too, in giving weight to our doctrines by a life of severe virtue; by boldly

rebuking vice, even in the greatest..when duty and a fit opportunity call us to it; and if by this we fall under their displeasure, suffering with a constancy like his: and even by our deaths bearing testimony to God and his truth. These things duly attended to would make a mighty change even in a profligate and profane world; and as it is our duty (ours especially who are ministers of Christ) to pursue them vigorously, so the blessed effects of reforming mankind are so very many, so very great, as to deserve our daily fervent prayers, that God would promote and succeed the good work. And this our church hath taught us to recommend very pertinently to the divine favour and assistance in the Collect for this day:

O Lord Jesu Christ, who at thy first coming didst send thy messenger to prepare thy way before thee; Grant that the ministers and stewards of thy mysteries may likewise so prepare and make ready thy way, by turning the hearts of the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, that at thy second coming to judge the world we may be found an acceptable people in thy sight, who livest and reignest with the Father and the Holy Spirit, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

THE FOURTH SUNDAY IN ADVENT.

THE COLLECT.

O LORD, raise up (we pray thee) thy power, and come among us, and with great might succour us; that whereas, through our sins and wickedness, we are sore let and hindered in running the race that is set before us, thy bountiful grace and mercy may speedily help and deliver us; through the satisfaction of thy Son our Lord, to whom with thee and the Holy Ghost be honour and glory, world without end. Amen.

THE EPISTLE. Phil. iv. 4.

4 *Rejoice in the Lord alway: and again I say, Rejoice.* 4. Support your spirits with a holy and spiritual joy; and how unseasonable soever this advice may seem to your present state of affliction, yet I must urge it again, as a duty fitting all times and conditions of life.

5 *Let your moderation be known unto all men. The Lord is at hand.* 5. Be not rigorous in insisting upon your utmost right, nor impatient in suffering wrong, but let your temper and com-

posure of mind be manifest to all sorts of people, and upon all occasions. For consider, that the Judge is not far off, who will certainly make you amends for all your condescensions, and reward all your patience.

6 *Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God.*

assistance, so as at the same time to acknowledge his goodness in all the calamities which befall you.

7 *And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.*

all your trials, and secure to you such an evenness and inward satisfaction of mind as we are not able to express or conceive.

6. Let no difficulties make you immoderately anxious, but commit all your affairs to God in prayer for his assistance.

7. Thus if ye do, the sense of a reward in Christ Jesus will be a strong guard against

COMMENT.

ST. PAUL in this passage exhorts the Philippians to the practice of some virtues, which are not only useful and proper to all sorts and all conditions of Christians, but more particularly seasonable to an afflicted and persecuted state. Such as he had before, in his first and third chapters, described the church at that time to be in, to whom this Epistle was addressed.

The first of these is *rejoicing in the Lord alway*: and, because in circumstances so distressed as theirs, this might at first view look like a duty impracticable, and out of time; he enforces and insists upon it in the latter clause of the verse; to shew that his command did not proceed from any heat of inconsiderate zeal, any want of regard, either to the greatness of their present trials, or to that infirmity of human nature which is too apt to be overborne by such; but that this is a disposition of mind which even those trials would very well bear, nay, which they required from them. *Again, I say, Rejoice.*

For a right understanding of this matter, I will briefly speak to the nature of this duty: and then shew, that it is both practicable and of perpetual obligation.

I. As to the duty itself: let it be considered that, since joy is a satisfaction resulting from the sense of some present good; *rejoicing in the Lord* must needs import that comfort and contentment, which holy men have (for none but holy men can have it) in an assurance that God is their God; that is, that they are such as he particularly loves and favours, and will make infinitely happy in the enjoyment of himself. And this is the consideration that Christians here are commanded to take continual delight in, even in despite of all those afflictions which labour to take away or interrupt their joy.

II. Now that this is a command, not at any time, or in any conjuncture of circumstances impracticable, may appear from the following considerations:

1. That God, and such an enjoyment of him as he reserves for good

men, is our chief good. And that, not only as he is in all other respects the fulness of all excellence and perfection, but in regard his goodness is unchangeable, and those *whom he loves he loves unto the end*. Although therefore to have commanded us to *rejoice always* in any thing besides had been an absurd and impracticable command, because all other good things are variable and fugitive, short and uncertain; yet is it not so, to *rejoice always in the Lord*, because he is always the same; a good always present and always perfect; one that never leaves nor forsakes those who are careful not to forsake him. And when we do so, the change is not in him but in ourselves, who fall from our happiness and forfeit our comforts, by breaking that condition, which God, who is always constant to his part, hath appointed, as the only means of entitling us to them.

2. But afflictions are very consistent with this joy, because God hath nowhere declared that these are certain marks of his displeasure, or that he loves any man the less for being poor, or sick, or in pain, or slandered, or hated, or persecuted. These things make no necessary change in our virtue, and consequently not in God's love towards us, and therefore not in our interest in him, which is the true foundation of this joy. So far from this, that,

3. Afflictions are often declared in Scripture to be sent for our advantage, to make us better men, to advance our virtue and our future happiness, to be placed to our account in the great day of reckoning, and *'to work out for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory; a glory, with which the sufferings of the present time are not worthy to be compared*. And therefore the joy mentioned here does by no means require such an abstractedness of mind and unconcernedness under present sufferings, as some men would persuade us human nature cannot come up to. It being a principle common to all the transactions of life, to be content and even pleasant under present hardships and sufferings, in prospect of a much greater profit to be attained by them. And this is all religion expects from us; nay, it does not expect so much as we daily submit to for raising our fortunes or securing our ease in this world; because the bliss we aim at, as Christians, is infinitely more desirable, more disproportionate to the utmost we can endure for it: and the certainty we have of attaining it is infinitely greater. In other cases, we go upon probable circumstances, and great odds on our side; but here we have sure promises to depend upon, and such as cannot fail us.

Setting aside therefore the case of melancholy and erroneous opinions, which are the real cause of that uncomfortable state of mind that many people, truly good, appear to be under; I take the true reasons why we see no more of this joy in the world, to be, either men's own sins and failings indulged, which must needs abate this satisfaction to them, who are sensible how much they have deserved to lose it; or else men's too great fondness for the world, which cannot but at once make the sense of present sufferings more tender and

afflicting; and their desires and love of future happiness less eager and supporting. For to attain this joy it is necessary our minds be of David's frame when he cried out, *"Whom have I in heaven but thee, and there is none upon earth whom I desire in comparison of thee."*

From hence the apostle proceeds in the next verse to enjoin another duty, wherein we are to consider two things:

- I. First, the duty itself. And,
- II. Secondly, the reason enforcing it.

In the former there are three things to be observed:

1. The nature of the thing, *moderation*. The original word seems primarily to import such a candid temper, as disposes men to an equitable proceeding in cases which the law hath not made sufficient provision for. Not stretching things to their utmost rigor on the one hand, not a supine remissness on the other; but receding from our right where it is fit, and treating others with all that gentleness and just forbearance which we in their case would think it reasonable to find.

2. It is ordered, secondly, that this moderation should be *known*, that is, not to rest only in the inward disposition, but to be manifested in all our actions, and that in so eminent a degree, that it might serve for a particular character to distinguish Christians by.

3. It is expected, thirdly, that this should extend to all occasions and all manner of persons. For to behave one's self amicably and meekly to those who are of the same opinion, engaged in the same interest, and ready to do the same by us in return, is no great matter: but to preserve this evenness and sweetness of temper to such as differ in judgment, as use us ill; to return equity for injustice, gentleness for oppression and hardship; to put the most favourable construction upon the actions of them who make it their business to provoke and persecute us; (as the Philippians here are exhorted to deal by their enemies without exception, whether ignorant idolatrous Gentiles, or perverse contentious Jews;) this is a noble conquest over our passions; such as demonstrates the mighty power of that religion which could have so commanding an influence upon human nature when touched in the tenderest part, which hath need of some very strong motive to check and control those resentments that injuries and ill treatment are apt to stir in our breasts. And what that motive is, the latter clause of the verse tells us in those words,

The Lord is at hand. By which some understand, that God is always present with us: a strict observer of our actions, and therefore we should be exceeding careful to behave ourselves as men sensible that his eye is always upon them: a ready help in our trouble, and an irresistible avenger of our wrongs, whenever he sees fit to rescue us from suffering, or to call them to account by whom we suffer unjustly. But others, more agreeably (as I presume) to the apostle's intent, interpret this of Christ's coming to judgment: the time of which seems then to be believed not very far off. And if we consider that particular judgment which each of us undergo at the

day of death, (which determines that state of our accounts wherein the general judgment will be sure to find us,) in this sense it is evident to a demonstration *that the Lord is at hand*, and his coming cannot be at any great distance from any man whatsoever. The sum then of this matter is, that the consideration of a future judgment, and the near as well as sure prospect that Christians have of it, is a good argument why they should not only bear afflictions and injuries with patience; not only support and delight themselves in the comforts of a good God and a good conscience, as the verse before directs; but (which is an attainment somewhat higher still) why they should behave themselves with great temper and all imaginable equity even towards those men who are the instruments and next causes of their sufferings. And the strength of this argument might, would the measure of this discourse permit, be shewn to lie in these following considerations:

1. First, the nature and design of this judgment: which consists in a most exact inquiry after all that passed in this present state of trial, and a just distribution of such a recompense as men's behaviour hath qualified them for. Into this account will come all the evil we suffer, as well as all the good we do. And therefore we need not be rigorous to do ourselves right, since there is one coming who will be sure to right us; we need not scruple any concessions or meekness in departing from what was our due, because in the end we shall be no losers for any supposed advantages given up by a principle of humility and patience and charity: we need not push on that revenge so hastily, which God will inflict in his own time without our joining in it; and give us the satisfaction of vindicating his glory and our innocence to all the world. Which is the only consideration that can render the punishment even of our worst enemies just matter of satisfaction to us. We have no reason to think God slow or negligent of our affairs, for the time of hearing our cause is not yet. And would we have our adversary punished before his trial? We must not grow impatient at the barbarity or the continuance of our persecutions or afflictions, since the season of retribution is not come; nay, since even these delays will be placed to the reckoning; since the longer we are tried in the furnace, the more refined we shall come out from our dross, the brighter we shall shine; and every thorn in our crown shall be changed into a ray of glory. So profitable are our pains; so nicely treasured up are our tears; so gainful is our loss; so sure a method of exaltation is condescension and meekness; so firm a security of our right, to endure wrongfully, not to insist upon our point to the utmost; so wise a course to obtain infinitely more good than we have deserved, not to requite our enemies with so much ill as they have deserved.

2. Secondly, the person who shall execute this judgment; the Lord, even Christ Jesus. He who, as at this time, left the glories of heaven to put on infirm and mortal flesh; and can any condescensions of ours be compared to this? He who underwent poverty and contempt, scorn and reproach, pain and death; and are any indigni-

ties, any wrongs, any sufferings we complain of, fit to be named with these? He who endured all things by free choice; and do we fret and murmur at those which God sends, or makes wicked men the executioners of upon us? He who knew no sin; and do we complain for the punishment, nay, the much less than due punishment of our offences? He who did and suffered all this for his enemies, who, in all this dispensation of meekness and love, left us a pattern that we should follow his steps; and can we dispute the forgiving of enemies and injuries after his command and example? He who is so very highly exalted, so gloriously rewarded for all his sufferings, and who hath declared, that they who suffer with him shall also reign with him; and can we doubt that good amends shall be made us, when we see it made so amply to him already? when he is the very person empowered to make it, who loved us so as to die for us, who declares himself persecuted in his members, who gave us these commands, who set us this example, who knows that we endure purely for his sake, for the advancement of his honour, and in a faithful dependence upon his promises?

3. Thirdly, another consideration, which adds weight to this argument, is the approach of this day of recompense; *the Lord is at hand*: that is, a change there will soon be of their present state, and a deliverance to good men from suffering and persecution. And this at least is one comfort, common to all we endure in the body, that such evils cannot last always, that they may, nay, quickly must have an end; and though even this would be but cold comfort to men who had no notion of a future being; yet to them who consider that the dispensations of providence here are not final and conclusive, who steadfastly expect another life, for which they were principally made, and wherein alone entire happiness is to be had; who are taught, that the afflictions of a moment work out for them a glory that shall be eternal; to such, I say, even the longest term of mortality will seem in comparison as nothing, and the burden their Master lays upon them, how heavy soever and grievous to be borne it may appear, when abstractedly considered, and with regard to frail flesh and blood, yet in the account of faith, and when taken with its appendage of a crown everlasting, a bliss unspeakable, a joy that no man takes from us, is thus but *light*; and rather to be chosen than all the prosperity and pleasures of sin, than all this shadow of a world that passeth so swiftly away.

Another exhortation follows; which, though delivered in general terms, is yet more especially proper for the time of affliction and persecution: *Be careful for nothing, but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known unto God.* Which words would oblige me to observe three things:

I. To inquire what sort of carefulness it is from which the apostle here dissuades his Philippians, and in them all Christians in distressed circumstances.

II. The remedy for afflictions prescribed in the place of their own carefulness ; which is, committing ourselves and all our affairs to the protection and disposal of God by devout *prayer*.

III. A necessary qualification of our prayers, even when most afflicted ; that even then they be attended with *thanksgiving*.

But these points justly handled would so far exceed the designed proportions of this discourse, that I beg my reader's leave to refer him for satisfaction concerning them to the places set down in the margin.

It only now remains that I observe something briefly from the last verse, and so conclude this discourse.

Now here, by *the peace of God* some understand the reconciliation made with mankind in our blessed Saviour, a mystery far exceeding the comprehension, not of human only, but of all created and finite understandings. But the sense most apposite to the apostle's purpose seems to be, not only that peace considered in itself, but a comfortable sense of, and firm persuasion that we have a share in it ; and that this will, even under the worst treatment and heaviest afflictions, preserve the mind seriously affected with it in such a state of undisturbed tranquillity, as is not possible for any to conceive whom their own happy experience hath not convinced. This sense seems to be much favoured by the just importance of that original word which our translators render *sleep*. A military term proper to garrisons, and intimating that this inward peace is a strong guard, and impregnable defence against all the tumults and tempests of a boisterous and uncertain world : such as will neither suffer our hearts to be overpowered, that is, our affections vitiated by immoderate fears or hopes or desires of earthly objects : nor our minds to be captivated, that is, our understanding and judgment to be imposed upon, by false notions of temporal good or evil : but will set us above the world, and so support and entertain us with spiritual consolations, the continual feast of a good conscience at present, and the prospect of bliss unspeakable and immortal afterwards ; that any accidents here below will be incapable of getting within us, or making any disorderly impressions. But we shall esteem of them as things foreign to our true interest, and look upon them with all the indifference which the most abstracted condition of a soul united to the body is capable of ; constantly taking sanctuary in God, as our firm and only hope and stay, and using his dispensations of every kind, as so many opportunities and instruments put into our hands by Providence, to profit of, and improve our virtue and true happiness by.

The only remark I shall add now is, that as this steady composure and serenity of mind may be applied to all the duties recommended in the Epistle of this day, as their effect and reward ; so it is immediately annexed, and seems in a special manner to belong to that of a devout and thankful application to God by prayer. For prayer is a withdrawing a man's self from the world, and coming to God ; like leaving a clutter of business, or breaking away from the mixed company of

¹ For the two former, see Gospel for fifteenth Sunday after Trinity. For the third, see Epistle for twentieth Sunday after Trinity.

ε φρασηται.

people offensive and dangerous, or at the best nauseously ceremonious and vain, to solace himself with one friend alone, who is particularly dear to him. And the diligent performance of this duty leaves so sensible a satisfaction behind it, gives such a different turn to the soul, and inspires such heavenly dispositions, that the exercise of the temple and the retirements of the closet never go off without a grateful relish and powerful effect, except either too seldom or too negligently repeated. Most seasonable therefore and wise is the use which our excellent mother the Church makes of these words, in dismissing her children after the most solemn acts of worship with this passage of St. Paul, in form of a blessing; imploring, that what he foretells and promises here may be made good to the whole congregation. Most properly does she regard the distinction generally observed here between the heart and mind, by begging that her children and members may be kept in the knowledge and love of God, and of his Son Jesus Christ our Lord: and most reasonably may it be expected that this benediction will avail; since the nearer we approach to God our Saviour, by a spiritual communion in prayers and sacraments, and all other holy ordinances, the better we shall know him; and the better we know him, the more we shall be sure to love him. And were that love entire, did he but reign in and possess our hearts without a rival, we should then feel the best sense of that passage verified to the utmost, in a spiritual regard, and in our own particular cases, *that the work of righteousness is peace, and the effect of righteousness quietness and assurance for ever.*

THE GOSPEL. St. John i. 19-29.

19 *This is the record of John, when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, Who art thou?* 19. One very remarkable testimony which John Baptist gave to Jesus, was the answer he returned to a message from the great council of the Jews. The occasion whereof was thus: There was at that time an universal expectation of the Messiah appearing. Now John, having baptized great multitudes of people who had resorted to him, and thereby gained a mighty reputation, the sanhedrim sent some deputies, men of note for knowledge and authority, to examine whether he was that eminent person, or who he was.

20 *And he confessed, and denied not; but confessed, I am not the Christ.* 20. To this he replied, and persisted in it, that he was not the Christ.

21 *And they asked him, What then? Art thou Elias? And he saith, I am not. Art thou that prophet? And he answered, No.* 21. Then they proceeded to inquire, whether he were Elias the Tishbite, whom by a misconception of Malachi's prophecy (chap. iv. 5, 6) they expected personally to appear before the coming of the Messiah. To that he answered, that neither was he that person. Again they inquire whether he were any other prophet, (as Jeremiah for instance,) who, it seems, some thought would

rise from the dead, and appear at that time, Matth. xvi. 14. This he likewise denies.

22 *Then said they unto him, Who art thou? that we may give an answer to them that sent us. What sayest thou of thyself?*

22. After having received this account who he was not, they desire to be informed who he was; for that was what the council who deputed them would expect to be satisfied in.

23 *He said, I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness, Make straight the way of the Lord, as said the prophet Esaias.*

23. To this he replies, that he was that person prophesied of by Esaias, ch. lx. 3.

24 *And they which were sent were of the Pharisees.*

24. The persons who came upon this inquiry were of a sect both skilful in matters of the law, and so capable of judging, and particularly piqued against Jesus, and so not likely to make a report in his favour; upon both which considerations the answer returned by them to the sanhedrim is of undoubted credit.

25 *And they asked him, and said unto him, Why baptizest thou then, if thou be not that Christ, nor Elias, neither that prophet?*

25. At last they came up to the question which was chiefly aimed at all along; and that was, since he was not authorized by their councils, nor yet pretended to be any such eminent person, whose extraordinary mission and character might bear him out in acting without their appointment; how he durst take upon him to baptize, and make proselytes, and that not into the law of Moses, but after a new fashion.

26 *John answered them, saying, I baptize with water: but there standeth one among you, whom ye know not; was not such as they apprehended. He made no proselytes to himself, but only prepared them to receive one whom some of them might have seen, though they were not sensible of his character.*

27 *He it is, who coming after me is preferred before me, whose shoe's latchet I am not worthy to unloose.*

27. But, that in truth he was so far superior to him in dignity, though after him in time, that he owned himself unworthy to perform the meanest and most servile office about him. So far was he from presuming to say, that he was either the Messiah or in any degree to be compared to him.

28 *These things were done in Bethabara beyond Jordan, where John was baptizing.*

28. This whole matter was transacted in that place where the Israelites had passed over Jordan formerly, and where there was now a convenience of conveying people over that river. Which occasioning a greater resort, was made choice of by John as a fit place for him to preach and baptize in, and rendered what passed upon this occasion a matter generally known.

COMMENT.

THE paraphrase upon these words may suffice for an explanation, except in two points, which I shall endeavour to clear, and then proceed to raise some proper inferences from them.

Now the points I mean to insist upon are,

First, to reconcile the Baptist, here denying himself to be Elias, with our Saviour, expressly affirming him to have been the Elias *that was for to come*. And,

Secondly, to explain that preparation which Esaias prophesied should be, and by the Baptist was actually made for the coming of the Lord.

First, the difficulty with regard to the former of these points lies thus. The Jews universally believed that Elias should appear before the Messiah, and that this appearance should be a certain token and forerunner of his coming. This they grounded upon a prophecy of Malachi; and our Lord allows the opinion so far as to answer his disciples when objecting it, that John was the Elias meant in that prophet. The question here seems to proceed upon the general expectation of the Messiah about that time. And the Baptist's character was such as made some imagine him to be either the Christ himself or this eminent forerunner of him. If then he were not the Elias, how comes our Lord to declare he was? If he were, how comes he in this place to deny it? how especially, since he might easily conclude, that the declaring himself so to be would have very much disposed the Jews to receive Christ at his public appearance among them? For the full resolution of this matter, I shall speak to the following particulars:

I. I shall consider the prophecy which is the foundation of this opinion.

II. I shall observe the application made of it to John Baptist by our blessed Saviour.

III. I shall consider the Baptist's answer here, and shew the agreement of it both with Malachi's prediction and our Lord's application.

I. As to the prophecy itself. This we have in two passages of Malachi. Chap. iii. 1. in these words, *Behold, I will send my messenger, and he shall prepare the way before me: and the Lord, whom ye seek, shall suddenly come to his temple*. The only reflection I make upon this at present is, that by *the Lord* here the Jews heretofore understood the Messiah; that the coming of that Lord to his temple imports his appearance while that temple stood: and that, by the *messenger to prepare his way*, is meant some eminent person, whose ministry, about the time of his approach, should set things in order, and dispose the people to give him a due reception. Consequently, if this prediction have any truth in it, it cannot mean an advent still future, (as the modern Jews pretend,) but must have been accomplished long ago. That is, the Messiah and his messenger must have

come before the raising of that temple, the destruction of Jerusalem, and the dispersion of the Jewish polity and people.

The other, chap. iv. 5, 6, runs thus: *Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord. And he shall turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers, lest I come and smite the earth with a curse.* Here we have a description of the person to be sent, the time of sending him, the office he was to perform, and the end that he was to serve by it.

1. The person is called *Elijah the prophet*. From whence the Jews imagined, either that the body of Elijah was preserved in Paradise, and should again appear upon earth at this season appointed for it; or that, this body being dissolved, God would infuse the spirit of Elijah into a new one, created for that purpose. So that either way the very person of Elijah should appear before this day of the Lord. But Christian interpreters think the passage intended of one so very like to Elijah in temper, in office, and other circumstances; that this resemblance might be a sufficient ground for calling him by that name. And for such figures of speech, as we have instances in heathen authors, so the Scriptures particularly call the Messiah by the name David, who was a type of him; though David had been then long dead, and there was no expectation of his appearing again, which could countenance the interpreting that expression of his own person^a. And this is so reasonable an exposition of Malachi's words here, that, besides the incontestible authority of our Lord, who thus explains it, we have the confession of some learned Jews, that it need not be rigorously confined to Elias in person^b, but may mean some other, called by his name, for the mutual and great resemblance which should be between them.

2. His office, or the business he should come upon, is said to be, *turning the heart of the fathers to, or, (as it may rather be rendered,) with the children*; that is, converting all sorts of people, old and young, from the error of their ways; and promoting a general reformation of manners among them, who should receive his doctrine, and be warned to escape the dreadful judgments denounced by him against such as still persisted in their disobedience.

3. To which purpose we may observe the time when this eminent person was to appear to exercise his ministry, before *the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord*. By which, as most interpreters agree, is meant that time when God should take vengeance upon the Jews; in the final destruction of their city and polity. This is particularly called *the day*, and *the terrible day of God* by Joel, interpreted in the New Testament, by our Lord himself, and by St. Peter. The prophetic style is lofty and full of figures, and often represents the overthrow of one nation in terms which, taken literally and in their utmost extent, import an universal destruction of the whole world. Some indeed confine it to the day of judgment only. But,

^a Ezek. xxxiv. 23, 24; xxxvii. 24, 25; Hosea iii. 5.

^b See Poenck on Mal. iv. 5.

^c Joel ii; Matth. xxiv; Acts ii.

that the former was (at least primarily) intended by the prophet, seems clear from this (not to mention at present any other) reason :

The end of this prophet's coming is said here to be the preventing, or escaping this *great and dreadful day*. Which agrees very well with the prediction of temporal judgments, but not with that general one at the day of doom. For that day is irreversibly fixed, the season of mercy is then at an end, and justice takes place. Reformation comes too late when retribution begins; and, if by *the earth* we should mean, not only the land of Judæa, but all the habitable world, as some Jewish writers would expound it; yet even so the description comes short of that which the Scriptures give us of the last judgment. When, as even the Old Testament declares, in a sense these interpreters are obliged to submit to, by this application of Malachi's prophecy, not this lower world only, and the things contained in it, but even *all the host of heaven shall be dissolved, and the heavens themselves rolled together as a scroll*; when these, as well as the earth, *shall perish*, be shrivelled and burnt up, and there shall be *new heavens* as well as a *new earth*. From whence it will follow, that either the text before us is meant of the destruction of the Jewish nation only, or at least so meant of the last judgment, as not to exclude, but imply this most significant type of it.

The sum then of the prophecy thus explained seems to be this: that before the destruction of Jerusalem there should come an eminent person from God, as a messenger to prepare the way for the Messiah; that he should so far resemble Elijah as to deserve the same name; that he should be very powerful in bringing men to repentance; and that they who were wrought upon by him to this purpose should effectually deliver themselves from those calamities brought upon the Jews at the time when their temple and city were destroyed: which was that *curse* the prophet had particularly in view, and threatened his people with, in case they continued obstinate under the ministry of this messenger, and of that Lord whose way he thus prepared.

II. This interpretation will be confirmed beyond all reasonable doubt, if we consider the applications of this prophecy made to the Baptist in the New Testament. Of which it shall suffice to produce three very remarkable instances:

The first is contained in those words of the angel sent to foretell his miraculous birth, where we have him described under these characters: *He shall be great in the sight of the Lord, and shall drink neither wine nor strong drink; and he shall be filled with the Holy Ghost from his mother's womb; and many of the children of Israel shall he turn to the Lord their God. And he shall go before him in the spirit and power of Elias, to turn the hearts of the fathers to (or with) the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, to make ready a people prepared for the Lord.* Here we have a great many distinguishing marks of this excellent person, which if compared with the history

^d See Pocock on Mal. iv; Bp. Kidder Demonstr. Messias, part ii. chap. 6.

^e Isa. xxxiv. 4.

^f Psalm cii. 26.

^g Isa. lxxv. 17.

^h Luke i. 15, 16, 17.

of Elias will appear to be such a parallel, as might abundantly justify the giving that name to one so exceeding conformable to his manners and ministry. Elias is represented as a man whose prayers were exceeding effectual with God, and one, at whose word the heavens gave and withheld their moisture, which made him considered as much superior to those who were commonly sent by God to his people: and John is declared to be *a prophet, and more than a prophet*, so much more as to have it said expressly, *that among them that were born of women there had not risen a greater* (that is, no mere man before the coming of Christ, and the publication of his Gospel, was worthy to be had in higher veneration) *than John the Baptist*. Elias was a person of singular abstinence and austerity, sustained by the ¹cruse of oil and almost exhausted barrel of meal of a poor widow; much of his time spent in mountains and deserts, in long fastings and painful journeys, sustained by meat sometimes found unexpectedly, and at other times brought him by the fowls of the air; separated from the conversation of the world, and distinguished from their fashions by a peculiar habit, that carried an air of uncommon negligence and mortification. And John was no less remarkable for his solitude and sanctity and rigid abstemiousness. He continued ¹*in the wilderness till the day of his shewing unto Israel*; and there his clothing was exactly like that of Elijah, the skins of beasts, and a leathern girdle about his loins, and his meat was locusts and wild honey. Before Elijah's translation, his disciple ^m*Elisha prays for a double portion of his spirit*, that is, such an extraordinary measure of what his master had been endued with, as might in that respect confer upon him the privilege of the first-born under the law; which was, to have twice as much in sharing the estate as any other child in the family. And the liberal communications of this divine grace to the Baptist are not only intimated by those titles of honour, by which our Saviour gives him the preference above any other prophet; but positively expressed in the angel's account of him, by saying he should be *filled with the Holy Ghost from his mother's womb*; meaning, that this gift should constantly attend him, and should be imparted in plenty as great as the capacity of human nature could admit. In ⁿElijah's time the people were sunk into idolatry, and he stood almost alone in the worship of the true God; but yet his zeal and holy courage was such as singly, and with wonderful success, to encounter the numerous prophets of Baal, though backed with all the interest of a wicked king and queen and a debauched court: at St. John's ^oappearance the corruption of manners was no less general; and, though the same avowing of false gods did not reign then, yet the service of the true God was so corrupted as utterly to evacuate the design of all religion by hypocrisy and empty forms of godliness. This the Baptist inveighed against with a vigour and efficacy equal to Elias, such as spared the vipers of that generation as little as the other had done those in countenance with Ahab;

¹ James v. 17, 18; ¹ Kings xvii. 1.

¹ Matth. xi. 11.

² ¹ Kings xvii. 4, 16; xix. 6, 7, 8; ² Kings i. 8.

¹ Luke i. 80; Matth. iii. 4.

^m ² Kings ii. 9; Deut. xxi. 17.

ⁿ ¹ Kings xviii.

^o Matth. iii.

and made a turn in the people, as surprising as that when Baal's priests were confounded by the testimony of fire from heaven. It were easy to carry this comparison on farther, to his reproofs of Herod, and the persecutions of his incestuous queen, answerable to the bold chidings of Ahab and the malice of Jezebel. But the instances already insisted on plainly prove him to have come in the *spirit and power of Elias*; and that there might remain no scruple whether this were the very Elias of Malachi, the angel here shuts up his character with the very words of that prophet, by saying, *He shall turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just.* The consequence of which conversion is, *making ready a people prepared for the Lord*, that is, fit to meet him at, or, as it is there, *to abide the day of his coming.*

The second place in which we find this prophecy applied to The Baptist is the eleventh of St. Matthew, where, upon John's sending two of his disciples to Jesus, in order to their receiving satisfaction that he was the true Messias, or that eminent person distinguished by the title of *he that should come*, Jesus, after having dismissed them, takes occasion to give the multitudes a very high character of John. Among other things, acquainting them, ver. 10, *that this was he, of whom it is written, Behold, I send my messenger before thy face, which shall prepare thy way before thee.* And again, ver. 14, *If ye will receive it, this is Elias, which was for to come.* From this application of Malachi's words at ver. 10, it is evident that John was intended by them; and from our Lord's own words at the 14th. It is no less evident, that the Elias in the fourth of Malachi is the very same with the messenger sent to prepare his way before him, in the third. Those words also, *εἰ θέλετε δεξασθαι*, *if ye will receive him*, (for thus they may be rendered as well as *receive it*, neither *him* nor *it* being in the original,) carry a very significant sense, and such as will not suffer us to understand them of the very person of Elias. For had the Tishbite himself appeared, or that fable of a transmigration of his soul into any other been the ground of that person's being called Elias; these were events that could in no degree depend upon the people's receiving or rejecting him. But the meaning seems to be, that John Baptist was the messenger sent to perform all those offices preparatory to the coming of the Lord, which Malachi had foretold should be done by the prophet upon whom that character of Elias had been fixed. And this he could not do to any but them who would receive him. For, *turning the hearts of fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just*, being such a change of affections and manners as of necessity requires a concurrence of their own will who are so turned, and this being the very business which the person styled Elias was to come about and be distinguished by, it was very proper for our Lord, in his discourse to the multitudes, to put in that limitation, *if ye will receive it or him*; because, to such as were content to hearken and submit to John's ministry he was effectually, but to as many as would not suffer themselves to be won by it he could not possibly be, the promised Elias.

The third and last passage which I shall mention to this purpose is that of Matth. xvii. 10—13. For the better understanding whereof we shall do well to observe, that, some little time before, our Lord had encouraged his disciples to constancy under afflictions by promises of a reward and deliverance at his coming in the *"glory of his Father"*. For a farther confirmation of this truth, he gave a specimen of his glory to three of those disciples at his *"transfiguration on the mount"*, where they saw Moses and Elias talking with him, and had a particular revelation from heaven, whereby precedence was given to Jesus before those two eminent prophets. For at the 9th verse they are commanded not to publish *the vision* (what had passed in the mount) *till the Son of man was risen again from the dead*. But St. Mark tells us, *"they questioned among themselves what this rising from the dead should mean"*; which sure they needed not to have done, if the subject of this discourse had been nothing else but the death and resurrection of the Son of man. Nor could they be at a loss what was meant by *rising from the dead* in general; but how the Messiah, whom we find them upon all occasions hard to believe capable of dying, should be concerned in any such resurrection. And hence it is that Peter could by no means persuade himself that our Lord should suffer the things he foretold of himself, as thinking this altogether inconsistent with that confession he had so lately made, and his Master so highly approved, that Jesus was *"the Christ, the Son of the living God"*. This will be yet more evident, if we attend to the connexion of the following words. For upon mention of this *vision*, the disciples immediately ask, *"Why then say the scribes that Elias must first come?"* To which Jesus answers, that *Elias truly should first come, and restore all things*. But I say unto you, that *Elias is come already, and they knew him not, but have done unto him whatsoever they listed*. Now from hence it appears, that whatever the matter of that vision were, or that *Efodas*, which Christ should accomplish at Jerusalem (as *"St. Luke"* phrases it), they thought that it could not be accomplished till after the coming of Elias. This opinion was founded upon the tradition and unanimous consent of the learned in the law, and expounders of prophetic Scripture: that tradition our Lord allows to be well grounded, and to have had a just foundation in the words of Malachi particularly; which be here, in short but comprehensive terms, reminds them of, and at the same time, by saying *Elias should come and restore all things*, intimates that prophecy to be meant, not of such a transient appearance as they had seen him make in the mount, but of a long and laborious course of ministry. For by *the restoring all things* is implied all that preaching of repentance, and the conversion of sinners consequent upon it, which *"Malachi and the angel in "St. Luke"* have set down in terms at large. In the mean while the question still remains, what notable event that was, which the sending of Elias is foretold as antecedent to. Not the death of Christ certainly, for the scribes do not seem to have expected that the Messiah should die at

^m Chap. xvi. 27. ⁿ xvii. 1—5. ^o Mark ix. 10. ^p Mark xvi. 22. ^q xvi. 16.

^r Matth. xvii. 10, 11, 12. ^s Luke ix. 31. ^t Mal. iv. 6. ^u Luke i. 17.

all; nor do we find any prophecy which makes Elijah's coming a necessary forerunner of that death. But *the great and dreadful day of the Lord, when he should come and smite the earth with a curse*, it is expressly declared, he should be sent before. And therefore this seems to have made a part at least of our Lord's discourse with Moses and Elias. This, by what hath been said under my first particular, appears very properly to be called our Lord's *ἔξοδος*, or finishing act upon Jerusalem; and the understanding it in this sense furnishes us with a plain account of the disciples' scruple, which none of the other constructions usually put upon the place seems to do. This makes the thread of discourse very natural and close, when upon mention of that vision (and being forbidden to tell how Christ would manifest his glory in that remarkable providence, till his resurrection had prepared men's minds for the belief of his divine power) they immediately desire to be satisfied in that difficulty, how this can be, since the scribes all agreed that *Elias must first come*.

In the mean while this is farther observable; that our Lord, in the answer to that inquiry, makes use of the very same word with that in the Greek of Malachi; that he describes the office and errand of Elias in such terms as left no manner of doubt in them, that the person prophesied of there was not the very Elias who was so eminent in Ahab's reign, but another, promised under the same name and character. And, whatever were the proper importance of *his restoring all things*, (which I shall have occasion to examine hereafter,) they saw reason enough to conclude the thing exactly fulfilled, and discerned very clearly who it was to whom those words of Malachi must needs belong; for so it follows, ver. 13. *Then the disciples understood that he spake unto them of John the Baptist*.

III. The only thing remaining upon this argument is, to inquire how the Baptist's answer here, which denies him to be Elias, agrees with Malachi's prediction in the Old, and those applications of it to him, which we have seen so fully and solemnly made in the New Testament. As what hath been already observed may suffice to acquaint us, that it was the general persuasion of that age, so hath it been all along the prevailing notion among the Jews, that Elias should, in his own proper person, come to prepare the way for the Messiah. Now the world being at that time big with expectations of the Messiah, and John exercising his ministry of repentance after an unusual method, and with great authority, the great council at Jerusalem send to inquire whether he were either the Christ, or Elias now returned from heaven, as they imagined he was to do upon Christ's appearance. To this their sense of the question he replies in express terms, that he was neither the one nor the other. Which yet does not hinder his being, nor at all interfere with our Lord's affirming him to be, the person foretold under the name and character of Elias, in the true signification of Malachi's prophecy; though he were not the very Elias who had lived in king Ahab's time, of whose second coming into the world the sanhedrim now inquired, according to their mistaken construction of that prophecy.

But still it may be urged, that in reason and charity this matter ought at least to have been more fully explained, and those Jews not left thus in the dark in a question of such importance; since the setting them right in the meaning of Malachi's prediction would in all likelihood have proved a very powerful inducement to their believing that Jesus was the Christ. I answer, that this was sufficiently done in those words at ver. 23, where to that query, *Who art thou, that we may give an answer to them that sent us? What sayest thou of thyself?* he said, *I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness, Make straight the way of the Lord, as said the prophet Esaias.* For the clearing this point, we are to observe that the Jews, besides their scriptures, seem to have had constant authentic traditions, whereby the darker passages of the prophetic writings (several of those especially which relate to the times of the Messiah) were interpreted. This consideration is of great weight in the matter now before us. For, as the Elias in Malachi iv. appears to be the very same with the *messenger* sent before his face, ch. iii. 1, by our Lord's applying those two scriptures together to the Baptist; so Malachi's *messenger*, and Esaias's *voice of one crying in the wilderness*, appear no less evidently to be meant of the same person, by St. Mark's application of both to the same Baptist. Whose very first period of his book runs thus; *The beginning of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God; as it is written in the prophets, Behold, I send my messenger before thy face, which shall prepare thy way before thee. The voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his paths straight. John did baptize in the wilderness, and preach the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins.* To support this argument, I need not insist upon the Divine assistance and inspiration, but would only ask that St. Mark may be allowed to have common sense. For it would plainly argue a man forsaken even of that, to lay the very foundation of his book in two prophecies joined together, whose agreement in the same object was disputed, especially where there were so many enemies, who wanted neither inclination nor skill to confute and put him to shame in any misconstructions of this kind. If then (to return to the matter in hand) that prophecy of Esaias did and were acknowledged to point at the same person with the other in Malachi, it follows that the Baptist, by returning answer to those great oracles in the sanhedrim, that he was Esaias's voice crying in the wilderness, did, in effect and by necessary consequence, affirm himself to be Malachi's Elias, though not that Elias whom they erroneously expected. And thus St. John's answer to the Jews is so far from contradicting what our Lord asserts concerning him, however in words they may seem inconsistent, that it is in truth the very same thing; the persons in Esay and Malachi the same, and the business they came about the same. All which will appear more plainly, if we now, in the

Second place, consider the preparation which it was foretold this person should make, and how that prediction was actually fulfilled in

† See Judgment of the Jewish Church against the Unitar. ch. ii.

* Matth. xi. 10, 14.

† Mark i. 1—4.

John Baptist. Would the measure of this discourse allow it, yet to enlarge upon this head now were less proper than to defer that to another occasion, which will offer itself hereafter. All therefore needful to be done at present, is only to consider the importance of those phrases whereby the prophets foretold this person and his office, and briefly to observe what completion they found in his execution of it.

The passage in Isaiah manifestly alludes to harbingers, and such other officers as, upon the journeys of princes, were employed to take care that the ways should be levelled and put in order, and all such obstructions removed as might obstruct their passage, or render it less easy and commodious. And thus, upon the King of glory's approach, the preaching and baptism of John put mankind into a posture of receiving him, and greatly facilitated the design of his coming; by bringing them to a due sense of their sins; by disabusing them with regard to those advantages they vainly flattered themselves in, upon the account of a carnal descent from Abraham, or the superstitious observance of a ritual law; by foretelling the dreadful effects of God's anger upon all who did not apply themselves to true holiness, and bring forth fruits worthy of repentance. And in regard baptism was always looked upon to be a very significant and solemn thing, an engagement to duty, and an entering into covenant with God; this, when administered by John to persons already under the obligation of the law, shewed that as the Jews used to receive their proselytes in this manner, so the persons baptized by John did also undertake some new conditions, and indent for some privileges, which they did not understand themselves to be comprehended in before. Thus did he baptize them with a *baptism of repentance*, to become effectual for the remission of sins, by the faith and obedience of him, whom he then shewed them personally, as the *Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world*, and by making that belief and obedience the sole condition of being pardoned and accepted. Upon those accounts he is properly said to prepare the way of the Lord, and to restore, or, as some understand the word ἀποκαταστήσει, to *finish and perfect* all things; not only reducing them into due order for the Messiah's approach, but putting an end to the old, and making an entrance for them into the new dispensation. In which sense many have understood those words, that *the law and the prophets prophesied until John*; and that allusion of the Fathers, who represent the Baptist as a sort of middle partition between the Law and the Gospel. Of the Law, as a thing past, and now come to a period; of the Gospel, as commencing under him who was then actually present in person, and, with regard to his offices, just then about to be manifested among them. And therefore, since no part of John's doctrine terminated in himself, and since his baptism referred them to Christ for acceptance and salvation, he is most properly said to *prepare his way by this ministry*. As he did indeed in a more remote and obscure sense, by

several other circumstances relating to his own person and behaviour, which were eminent figures of Jesus Christ, and shall (by God's assistance) be taken into particular consideration hereafter.

In the mean while I shall conclude my present discourse with a few practical reflections arising from the portion of Scripture before us, and suitable to that season for which the Church hath here recommended it, as a proper subject of all Christians' meditation.

1. St. John, in the place now under consideration, hath set us an excellent pattern of true humility. The questions regarding those notions of the Pharisees, which would have tended to advance him in honour and esteem with the people, he returns answer to in negatives so direct and plain, as would admit of no ambiguity, no doubt at all. Those which concern his true character, he is content with such replies to, as refer to a past prophecy concerning himself, and leave them to draw the consequences arising from it. The testimony borne to our blessed Lord is conceived in terms so respectful and magnificent, as would not give the least encouragement for the most zealous of his admirers to draw any comparison between Jesus and him. Thus what might tend to remove all opinions of his being greater than in truth he was, is industriously contrived to undeceive his most partial followers; what was strictly his right is very sparingly and modestly delivered; and that which imports the preference due to that eminent person, whose forerunner he was, declares a distance as great, a reverence as profound, as words could possibly express. And how different a conduct is this now from that which the generality, even of them that would appear free from vanity and presumption, are used to exercise upon the like occasions! how well content are such to let the world go on in those mistakes concerning them which make for their own advantage! how willing to appear in a false light, at least to excuse themselves from setting their own characters in a true one, by lessening that esteem which comes from other men thinking more highly of them than they ought to think! How does this reproach all that laboured artifice of a dissembled humility, which renders a wilful depreciating of one's own worth only a nicer way of commending and exalting it! holds fast with one hand what it would seem to give up with the other, and, by an affectation of modesty, contrives to be more successfully arrogant and vain! The glorious things spoken of John elsewhere he might, without any breach of truth, have declared to those Jews of himself; but that eminent messenger sent to prepare the way of the Lord, that figurative Elias, who came in the spirit and power of the Tishbite, that *prophet, and more than a prophet*, that excelling person, than whom *there had not risen a greater among them that are born of women*, describes himself only in that of a *voice crying in the wilderness*, the lowest of all the characters which the ancient prophets had represented him by.

Thus have we in the Baptist a *second* instance of humility, which, when unfeigned, is by no means jealous of its utmost right, but so far from invading what belongs not to it, that it does not claim, nor is tenacious of its own; is well satisfied to appear in its meanest figure,

and even glad to seem little in the eyes of the world, that it may be greater in the eyes of God: but especially is never eager to magnify itself, choosing rather to win esteem by modesty and good works, than to lay claim to it by an anxious and unseemly publishing of its own qualifications and deserts: highly contented to become an instrument of God's glory and the good of men, even in the meanest capacity; and accounting it no shame to have others thought better than oneself.

Which leads me to a *third*, and that the highest instance of the Baptist's humility, expressed in those words, *b I baptize with water: but there standeth one among you, whom ye know not; he it is, who coming after me is preferred before me, whose shoe's latchet I am not worthy to unloose.* Emulation and envy are inseparable attendants upon pride; and they who can be content with equals, often find it hard to acknowledge, and harder yet to rejoice in, the excellencies of others superior to their own. But here we find the Baptist, upon all occasions, not only depressing his own worth, but industriously extolling, and declaring a mighty satisfaction in, those more liberal communications of the Holy Spirit to Jesus, which gave him incomparably the preference above himself. And this is a noble pitch of humility, when we, after his example, can see, and be just to, and sincerely congratulate the merits and distinguishing abilities of our brethren, without thinking our own at all disparaged, or taking less comfort in them, by their being more happy and in more esteem than ourselves. This is therefore described as one of the characters of charity, that it does not only *c not vaunt itself, but not envy others.* The eminent person now before us hath left us a pattern of virtue, conspicuous in no one instance more, because perhaps in none more seldom imitated, than in those frank confessions to his own disciples, who, most unlike their master in this point, could so ill brook a rival of his honour: *d He must increase, but I must decrease. He that hath the bride is the bridegroom: but the friend of the bridegroom, which standeth and heareth him, rejoiceth greatly because of the bridegroom's voice: this my joy therefore is fulfilled. He that cometh from above is above all.* And again, to shew the vastness of the distance, and how impious it was even to admit of any comparison between them, in the words now under consideration, *He it is, who coming after me is preferred before me, whose shoe's latchet I am not worthy to unloose.* And this was a qualification very necessary to be insisted upon. For, till we have subdued this spirit of emulation, and brought our minds to be content with being excelled by others, to be thankful for God's making them greater instruments of his glory, and to do right to their abilities for this purpose; to rejoice in the honour they acquire by them, and not to think our worth eclipsed by their brighter lustre, we do but flatter ourselves with a dissembled pride, and are not yet come up to that pitch of true humility of which this day's Gospel proposes the Baptist for our pattern.

^b Ver. 26, 27.

^c 1 Cor. xiii. 4.

^d John iii. 29, 30, 31.

2. Secondly, these words of St. John last insisted upon deserve to be very seriously considered, because they seem to contain a clear intimation of our blessed Lord's divine nature and excellencies. For what excellencies less than divine could justify that awful distance they express between so eminent a person and the holy Jesus? They are not words of compliment and form, but of strict truth and equity. And yet it will be very hard to understand them so, if the comparison be stated only between one prophet and another, only between the Prince and so venerable a harbinger: in short, if we understand them any otherwise than thus, that even he that was *more than a prophet*, and than whom there had not risen a greater ever born of women, was, notwithstanding, so many degrees inferior to him whose way he came to prepare, because he was so the son of a woman as to be more than man; the Son of God, and himself very God. And, thus considered, the passage now before us is so far from an affected strain of depressing himself, and magnifying his Master, that, could St. John have found any terms yet more lowly, they were still all far less than were due to that infinite distance, that essential greatness, between which and the most exalted of all its creatures there is no comparison, nay, not any manner of proportion to found a comparison upon.

3. But then the greater obligation have we, thirdly, to use all possible endeavours for disposing our souls to the virtue I have been enforcing. For if a person so highly favoured, so magnificently spoken of as the Baptist, were not worthy to serve this Lord in the meanest capacity, how low an opinion ought we to conceive of ourselves, whose sanctity and graces fall so very much beneath this bright example! How great is the honour of being admitted to serve him! how mighty the condescension of accepting and rewarding those poor expressions of the homage due to his majesty from weak and frail mortals, and (which does most of all depreciate our services) from vile polluted sinners! How seasonably is this pattern of humility recommended to our thoughts and imitation! how powerfully ought it to influence our souls, now especially, when the approaching festival calls upon us to commemorate an instance of it so much more astonishing! If the pattern set us by John should move, behold, a greater than John is here. For God himself descends from heaven; he does not disdain the womb of a virgin, the miseries, infirmities, and sufferings of human flesh; he exhibits himself to us in the form of a gentle babe, in the circumstances of a birth void of worldly pomp, not in swaddling clothes only, but in a manger too, with all the marks of poverty and neglect; he vouchsafes not only to be man, but to appear the last and lowest of men: and he, whose shoes the purest spirit, and the person exalted above the highest prophets, was not worthy to unloose, does, if I may so say, stoop down to unloose the latchet of the meanest of his servants. *Lord, what is man, that thou shouldst thus consider him, or the son of man, that thou shouldst with such amazing humility visit him!* But, Lord, what are we, if this mysterious condescension do not

excite our wonder, do not provoke our imitation! And how absurdly do we celebrate the inestimable blessing of God manifested in the flesh, if our hearts be not prepared with that humble disposition which is so frequently inculcated in thy Gospel, which was so particularly conspicuous in thy nativity, and to the inimitable perfection whereof we owe all the great things thou wert pleased to do, and all the bitter things thou wert content to suffer, for the redemption of thy own wretched creatures! O come then now into our souls, as thou didst heretofore into our flesh! Make us like thee as thou wert made like us; like thee in abasing ourselves here, that we may, like thee, be highly exalted hereafter.

The Nativity of our Lord, or the Birthday of CHRIST,

COMMONLY CALLED

CHRISTMAS-DAY.

THE COLLECT.

ALMIGHTY GOD, who hast ^agiven us thy only-begotten Son to take our nature upon him, and as at this time to be born ^bof a pure Virgin; Grant that we being ^cregenerate, and made thy children by adoption and grace, may daily be ^drenewed by thy Holy Spirit; through the same our Lord Jesus Christ, who liveth and reigneth with thee and the same Spirit, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

THE EPISTLE. Hebr. i. 1.

1 *God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets,* 1. God, who never suffered mankind to be left without all knowledge of himself and his will, hath yet distributed that knowledge in such different methods and proportions as he saw fit. To the Jews particularly and their ancestors he revealed his will by prophets, but this was done by piecemeals and parcels; and to them he discovered himself in visions, clouds, dreams, figures, and great variety of inspirations.

2 *Hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds;* 2. This was the condition of former ages, and that imperfect dispensation; but the Gospel, which is the last men are to expect, gives us a full declaration of his will, and excels the rest infinitely, upon the account of that hand which brings it to us.

^a John iii. 16; 1. 14.

^b Luke i. 27; Matt. i. 25.

^c John i. 12, 13; Rom. viii. 15.

^d Tit. iii. 5.

For this is no less a person than his own divine Son, to whom he hath given an universal dominion over all his creatures. Nor is it strange that they should all be subjected to this God-man, since he, as God, was the Lord and Creator of them all, equal in power to his Father:

3 *Who being the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person, and upholding all things by the word of his power, when he had by himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high;*

Father, the same are in the Son, and by him they are reflected down upon mankind. As he did with the Father create, so does he with him preserve and govern, all things by the same almighty power. And therefore, when this divine Person had condescended to become man, and expiate for our offences by the sacrifice of himself, God exalted his human nature to his throne, and gave him an unlimited dominion.

4 *Being made so much better than the angels, as he hath by inheritance obtained a more excellent name than they.*

4. Preferring him as far above the most glorious saints, the angels, as his divine original had set him above them before, as a Creator is above creatures, a king above subjects, a son above servants.

5 *For unto which of the angels said he at any time, Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee? And again, I will be to him a Father, and he shall be to me a Son?*

5. This is very manifest from the different manner of expression used in Scripture with regard to him and them. For those passages which concerned Christ were never meant of any angels. Nor does God call them sons begotten of him, or declare himself their Father, in that strict signification peculiar to this Son, who was begotten from all eternity, and declared of the same divine excellencies with the Father by his resurrection from the dead.

6 *And again, when he bringeth in the firstbegotten into the world, he saith, And let all the angels of God worship him.*

6. Likewise another psalm relating to this heir's investiture in his kingdom, is so far from equalling the angels to him, that it commands them to do him homage, and pay him the humblest adoration.

7 *And of the angels he saith, Who maketh his angels spirits, and his ministers a flame of fire.*

7. Those blessed spirits are always mentioned in the capacity of servants; and the efficacy of their ministry, as well as the activity of their nature, is described by comparing them to other creatures, such as winds and fire;

8 *But unto the Son he saith, Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever: a sceptre of righteousness is the sceptre of thy kingdom.*

9 *Thou hast loved righteousness, and hated iniquity; therefore God, even thy God, hath anointed thee with the oil of gladness above thy fellows.*

8, 9. But the Son is mentioned as a King seated upon an eternal throne, and exalted far above any creature whatsoever, as a reward for the justice of his administration; nay, he is addressed

to as God of the same incomprehensible perfections, and one with that Father, who hath thus dignified his human nature: for

10 *And, Thou, Lord, in the beginning hast laid the foundation of the earth; and the heavens are the works of thine hands:*

11 *They shall perish; but thou remainest; and they all shall wax old as doth a garment;*

12 *And as a vesture shalt thou fold them up, and they shall be changed: but thou art the same, and thy years shall not fail.*

to change and decay, and that they shall actually be by his almighty power one day demolished; laid aside like a garment put off to be worn no more; whereas his kingdom and nature are acknowledged to be eternal and immutable.

10, 11, 12. It is also observable, that another psalm attributes to the Son the creation of heaven and earth; which of necessity supposes him to be very God, and to have been before the things created by him. As is farther manifest by the same passage taking notice, that these creatures are subject

COMMENT.

THE author of this Epistle doth, in this and some following chapters, plainly make it his business to prove the just preeminence of the Christian dispensation above any other which had been then, I may add, or should at any time afterwards obtain, in the world. Which design he pursues, as upon sundry other arguments, not falling properly under our present consideration; so in the passage now before us, especially from two, which I shall make the subject of this discourse upon it.

I. The first is, the perfection of this above any other revelation of the divine will to mankind.

II. The second is, the excellence of that person by whom this revelation was imparted. Upon each of which, when I shall have so far enlarged as is necessary for a due explanation of the point; it shall be my endeavour to leave them both upon my reader's mind, with such applications as are suitable to the matter in hand, and to the solemnity of this important festival.

I. I begin with the perfection of the Christian revelation above any other afforded to mankind. And here we may observe,

1. First of all, that the condition of the greatest part of the world, before the coming of our blessed Saviour, was such as would admit of no manner of comparison with the advantages that followed after it. Of them it is that St. Paul speaks, when in his apology to the Athenians he calls the ages before Christ *the times of ignorance*; and when observing to the men of Lystra that *God in times past suffered all nations to walk in their own ways*, allowing little other knowledge of himself than what must be the natural result of that regular providence which sustains and governs the world. For so he goes on

there, *'Nevertheless he left not himself without witness, in that he did good, and gave us rain from heaven, and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness. And how few would they be who wisely considered and improved those gracious distributions as they might have done! Nay, how poor and defective would that knowledge and service of God be, which, even by them who made the utmost improvement those events were capable of, could possibly be attained, if compared with the discoveries God made of his nature and will by express revelation and rules of living! So just reason had the Psalmist to glory in the distinguishing kindness of Almighty God to his favourite people; *He sheweth his word unto Jacob, his statutes and his judgments unto Israel. He hath not dealt so with any nation: and as for his judgments, they have not known them.**

When therefore this Epistle begins with a comparison between the Jewish and the Christian revelation, we may very well understand the reason of doing so to be, not only because the persons immediately addressed to were concerned in the former of those revelations, but because the circumstances of no other people but them could pretend to rival, could indeed be worthy so much as to be named with ours upon this account. And therefore, to shew the Christian's advantage confessedly above that of all mankind, in point of divine light and knowledge, no more was necessary than to prove it superior to any in times past afforded to the Jews. And how far it was so, besides what will come under observation when my second particular shall be treated of, we have fair intimation given us in these two respects:

1. The methods by which such knowledge was communicated hitherto, ver. 1.

2. The title given to the Christian dispensation when calling it *the last days*, ver. 2.

1. The first difference between these two dispensations, taken notice of to our advantage, is contained in those words, *at sundry times and in divers manners*, for thus God's speaking to the fathers of these Hebrews by the prophets is described, ver. 1. Now, though our reading give the truth and remote sense of the text, yet the word rendered *sundry times* does more immediately and properly import by *several parcels*. So then the intent of the place is, that the knowledge of God, and his good pleasure, was dealt out to the Israelites in distinct portions; and that with such frugality (if I may have leave so to speak) as constantly to have some reserve of fresh discoveries for succeeding ages, which those that went before had lived in ignorance of.

To make this plain, we need no other instance than that which was in truth the end and aim, not only of the law, but of all the dispensations from the beginning of the world: the redemption, I mean, of mankind by Christ the blessed. Observe then the gradual notices of him, and the characters by which he should be distinguished at his coming. To Adam and Eve we find him promised in general, *as a man*; to Abraham, *as his posterity*; to Jacob, *as descending from*

^f Acts xiv. 17.

^g Psalm cxlvii. 19, 20.

^h πολυμερῶς.

ⁱ Gen. iii. 15.

^k Gen. xvii; xxii. 18.

the tribe of 'Judah in particular; to David, it was revealed that he should be of his family, and the ^m*fruit of his body*; to Micah, that he should be born ⁿ*in Bethlehem*; to Isaiah, that his birth should be miraculous, and his ^o*mother a virgin*; to the same prophet, the end and beneficial effects of his death; to Daniel, not these only, but the precise time of his suffering; to Haggai (lastly) and Zechariah and Malachi, that all these events should be ^q*accomplished before the destruction of the second temple*. Now, not to mention any more, if we compute the seasons of these few; the general prediction of a Saviour in human nature will be found to bear date before that of his being Abraham's seed, about two thousand and fourscore years; from this to the declaration of his particular tribe, were two hundred and fourscore years; thence to the prophecy of his particular family, above six hundred years; after that, to the signification of the manner and place of his miraculous nativity, more than three hundred years; and, lastly, that of his appearance and death, not long before the destruction of the second temple, foretold by Daniel and the rest after the captivity, must have followed all the forenamed prophecies at the distance of three hundred and fifty years, or thereabouts. Now every one of these struck more and more light into this most important mystery, and by the same proportions confirmed men's minds in the expectation of a Saviour, and gave the marks by which they might know him from any false pretender to that character. By so gentle, so slow degrees, was the dawning of those ages brought forward: a dawning of three thousand and almost six hundred years; and even at the determination of this long period, nay, and four hundred years after that, it was no better than a dawning still. For all this while the sun of righteousness darted his rising beams through a cloud of types and ceremonies; and did not shine in broad and perfect day, till the shadows and figures of the Levitical institution gave place to the simplicity of that better service, which taught men to *worship God in spirit and in truth*. And in this regard too the progress was gradual. For, as the fulness of time drew nearer, the duties of the moral law were more diligently inculcated, the substance and spiritual meaning of the ceremonies more fully explained; so that herein consisted a great part of the prophetic office, to correct the grossness of superstitious and carnal minds, who looked no deeper than the outward ordinance; and, laying all the stress there, never answered the intent of those commands, which they all the while vainly imagined themselves the most punctual performers of.

Again, as the measure, so likewise the way, in which God discovered himself heretofore, is very different from that made use of under the Gospel: for this was the apostle's meaning when saying, that this was done *in times past, as at sundry times, so in divers manners* too. Whereby we have reason to believe he had regard to the dreams, the visions, the voices, the thunders, the appearances of angels, the bright

^l Gen. xlix. 10.

^m Psalm cxxxii.

ⁿ Micah v. 2.

^o Isa. vii. 10, &c.

^p Isa. liii; Dan. ix.

^q Hag. ii; Zech. xiv; Mal. iii. 4.

clouds, the mercy-seat, and the many other circumstances which the history of the Old Testament relates the revelations of those times to have been attended with; and besides these, the dark parables, the intricate figures, the sudden raptures, the ecstasies, the general disorder of nature, and the sealing up of the senses, of which Abraham and Samuel and Jeremiah and Daniel, and sundry others, are famous instances. I might say, all the other prophets, one excepted; for *so* that passage of God's *talking with Moses face to face, as a man talketh with his friend*, is generally understood; that he alone of all mankind was not subject to the consternations and violent impressions usual upon such occasions. So that, be the particular form of the revelation what it would, still every sort affected the party receiving it with some very remarkable alteration both in body and mind.

2. Now the manifest advantage of the Christian above these antecedent dispensations must, according to the force of the foregoing argument, consist in the fulness of the discovery, and in the free and familiar manner of imparting it. Both which I take to be intimated here, in that very significant title given to the gospel age, when called by the apostle *these last days*. They who are at all acquainted with the Jewish forms of speech, know very well that no expressions are more frequent with them than *the latter days, the last times, the world to come*, and the like; and that their interpreters do generally understand the Scriptures where *such expressions occur of the coming and kingdom of the Messiah*. The reason is, because they looked upon this as the great revolution which should continue for ever unchangeable, and wherein all their hopes and expectations ought to centre as the completion of all the designs of providence; and upon the several states, whether of their own nation and church in particular, or of mankind in general, as not only antecedent, but even subordinate to it. The happiness of that time, as it is frequently set forth by other marks of peace and plenty, and all manner of worldly affluence and success; so is it particularly extolled for the perfection of those spiritual advantages then to be most liberally communicated to the world. Then it was that no man should need *to teach his neighbour or his brother, for they should all be taught of God, and every one should know him from the least unto the greatest*; then, that *the mountain¹ of the Lord's house should be established upon the top of the mountains, and all nations should flow into it*; then, that *the earth should be filled with the knowledge² of the glory of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea*. All which, and other glorious characters, as we see in part brought to pass long ago, by enlarging the Messiah's dominion over the many and distant countries where his doctrine hath been received, so have we reason to embrace those gradual advances of his kingdom in men's hearts as so many earnest and undoubted pledges of that absolute and unbounded conquest he shall make over ignorance and error, when the season of exerting his grace more plentifully shall come, and

¹ Numb. xii. 8. ² So Gen. xlix. 1; Numb. xxiv. 14; Isa. ii. 2; Mic. iv. 1; Dan. ii. 28.
³ Isa. lvi. 13; Jer. xxxi. 34. ⁴ Isa. ii. 2; Mic. iv. 1. ⁵ Hab. ii. 14.

effectually prepare, as well as proclaim the nearer approaches of his kingdom of glory. And though this season be one of those which the *Father hath put in his own power*, yet, be the distance from us what it will, it is sufficient that these are all the *days of the Messiah* to denominate them *the last days*. That phrase by no means necessarily importing the speedy end of this material world; but only, that, how long soever God shall suffer it to endure, he hath no subsequent dispensation in reserve; but hath fixed the Christian for that doctrine and service and trial, by which mankind are to express their obedience to him so long as there shall continue to be any state of discipline or obedience at all.

In the meanwhile, had not this been so distinctly foretold, yet men's own reason might abundantly convince them that what days soever were in this sense *the last*, the clearest and fullest discoveries of God and his will are a privilege certainly belonging to them. For the notion of a Being absolutely perfect will naturally lead us to conclude, that no design or work of such a Being shall be suffered to want its due perfection. If therefore the revealing himself to mankind in any degree at all be an action worthy of such a Being, the same goodness, which disposed him to this, cannot but dispose him to do it in such degrees as are necessary for all the purposes which that revelation was intended to serve. And if this were not done, in all the fulness designed, by the first discoveries, this is an argument that there is some future and larger discovery in reserve, by which the defects of those former shall be effectually supplied. So again, if God, for causes known to his infinite wisdom, have thought fit to accommodate different dispensations to different times and places, we have reason to look upon each of these in its order, as a nearer approach to perfection; and upon the final one, as that which hath all to recommend and enforce it which can be necessary, or ought to be expected. For infinite wisdom cannot change but for the better; and therefore when it declares itself unchangeably fixed in any method of promoting its own glory and the good of its creatures, we may, I think, safely depend upon it, that this last choice is not only preferable to all that went before, but that there cannot be another better; upon this very account, because God hath determined there shall not be any other after it.

As therefore it was an honour due to the days of the Messiah, that they should be *the last days*, so it is certainly a mercy to be highly esteemed, and acknowledged with all imaginable thankfulness, that Almighty God hath reserved us to these days. To a season of the brightest light; not the glimmerings of feeble reason uninstructed by divine revelation; not the distant prospects of a rising sun, refracted upon us through thick clouds of figures and ceremonies, but the clear shine of truth and righteousness: not a season in which it was impossible even for the best disposed minds to arrive at those measures of spiritual knowledge, which every man sincerely disposed to know may now without great difficulty attain to; but that, in which this apostle's observation is in this respect true also, that we are persons

for whom God hath provided better things, that even the faithfulest and most excellent of his servants heretofore should not however without us be made perfect.

The like advantage may this doctrine boast of above all that went before, with regard to the manner of imparting it to the world. It was not proclaimed in thunder and lightning, in flames of fire, and clouds of smoke, like the Law in mount Sinai: it was not enforced by miracles of vengeance and terror, such as might establish its authority upon the slavish principle of fear; nor were its mysteries communicated by any infusions of the Spirit, so fierce and overbearing as to create any disturbance of reason, any agonies of body, or alienation of mind, in the parties receiving them: but this whole matter was transacted by the most easy and familiar methods, and with all possible marks of kindness and condescension. A Master gentle and lowly, stooping to the capacities of the meanest, not disdaining the conversation of the vilest, provided they were vile in their own eyes, and applied to him for instruction and amendment. Confirming the truth of what he taught, by wonders of mercy and love; such as had a natural tendency to win rather than affright men; to engage the affections at the same time they convince the judgment; and void of all constraint, except that soft and welcome, and in all reason that strongest and least resistible of any, the force of ingenuity and gratitude, of goodness unexampled, and benefits never to be requited, never acknowledged, as they deserve. Doctrines inculcated with all the freedom of a three years' intimate acquaintance, and afterwards by the immediate and plentiful inspirations of the Spirit of God himself; propagated by the gift of tongues, enabling their first teachers, without art or study, to address themselves readily to hearers of different nations and languages; delivered with all possible simplicity and plainness of expression; urged with the weightiest and most proper arguments; and faithfully recorded, for the benefit of succeeding ages, by men assisted by the same Spirit, so as to secure them from all danger of falsehood or mistake; and upon every occasion so acted from above, as both to speak and write the words of soberness as well as truth. So different is the case of Christians, who live under a revelation, easy and clear in all necessary points of faith and practice, full and express in matters essential to salvation, from theirs, whose service was a *figure of good things to come*, whose light was darted through a cloud and mingled with shadows, and whose brightest discoveries were wrapped up in dark and enigmatical phrases proper to the prophetic style. The one, a sealed book to be unlocked by future events; the other, a plain relation of those events already brought to pass: the one, proposing a happiness in prospect and desire, the other, containing promises accomplished, and that long expected happiness now in actual possession. Such and so many, more indeed and nobler than the limits of this discourse, and the greatness of the subject, will allow to be represented in their just proportions, are the prerogatives of this dispensation. And yet even

all that is already, and all that might be said upon my first, comes infinitely short of that preeminence, which makes my

II. Second head: the excellence, I mean, of that Person, by whom this revelation was imparted to us: for there the apostle evidently lays his main stress; God spake in times past to our fathers *by the prophets*, but to us in these last days he hath spoken *by his Son*.

Now the design of this place is to prove the dignity of this last Messenger to be so far superior to that of any other, as to admit of no likeness, no comparison between them: that he hath excellencies peculiar to himself, and such as are communicable, not only to none, no not the best of the sons of men; but to none, no not the noblest creatures of any other kind. In a word, that he is of a nature truly divine, of the same essence and eternity with God the Father, and his Son in a manner and sense so proper and particular, as no other, however called such in Scripture, is or must be understood to be.

Now since the majesty of an infinite God must needs be too vast, not only for any words, but even for the most extended thought of a comprehension so narrow as ours; great care must be taken, in the expounding of Scripture, not to insist too rigorously upon those images and representations which are made use of there to rectify our notions of things so far above us, and used, not because they express the matter fully and in all its parts, but because we are not capable of better. And again, since one and the same image will not suffice to represent all that is necessary for us to believe, there is a necessity of doing it by several. And therefore we must be sure to observe for what purpose each of these is made choice of, and content ourselves with applying it to that difficulty which it was brought to illustrate, without drawing any perverse and dangerous consequences, by stretching it beyond its line, and so making it a foundation for inferences and opinions to which the author never meant it should extend. These necessary cautions being thus premised, I shall very briefly set before you the arguments for the divinity of our blessed Saviour contained in the passage now under consideration.

The first is, that God hath appointed him *heir of all things*. By which, no doubt, we are to understand that universal dominion, mentioned in other texts, which call him *a Prince and a Saviour, Lord and Christ, Lord both of the dead and living, Lord of all*; which speak of his *subduing all enemies*, even death itself, having *all things put under his feet*, all power in heaven and earth given unto him, being gone into heaven, and sitting down on the right hand of God, angels and authorities and powers being made subject unto him. A government, of which, as God, he stood possessed from all eternity; a government, which however his human nature might have hereditary title to, by virtue, and so from the very instant, of its personal union with the divine; yet was he not, as God and man both, actually invested with it, till after, and by way of compensation for, his death and suffer-

^y Acts v. 31; ii. 36; x. 36; Rom. xiv. 9; 1 Cor. xv. 25, 26; Matt. xxviii. 18; 1 Pet. iii. 22.

^z See ver. 3; Phil. ii. 6, 11.

ings. But a government withal, which, were not he very God as well as very man, it is not to be conceived how he could be qualified to exercise. There being, in the reason of the thing, no manner of inducement to persuade us, that any power and wisdom, less than that which could create all things, can be sufficient to govern all things. And therefore no method of arguing could be imagined more regular or conclusive than this of the apostle: which proceeds to shew in the

Second place, that the person by whom God now rules the world is the same by whom he *made the worlds*. Those very *worlds*, no doubt, which this epistle, by the same expressions, reckons it as the first instance of faith for us to *understand that they were framed by the word of God, so that the things which are seen were not made of things which do appear*. And consequently the creation attributed here to the Son is not any spiritual or figurative, but a proper and material one. Had the former only belonged to him, this had been no peculiar excellence; for the Gospel-state consisting of the making men new creatures, is in part the work of every planter of the Gospel. So that the *worlds* in this sense are what Christ's disciples, at least what Christ by his disciples, made. And yet we never find, even the most distant intimations of the Son ever making the world in such a manner as to have any creature a partner in the performance. Not only so, but the Scriptures, instead of countenancing, directly overthrow this fond imagination. For, whereas this metaphorical creation, or renewing the world unto righteousness, could concern mankind alone; the Son is declared to be the maker of many things which never had a part in any but a proper and material creation: *For by him were all things created that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones or dominions or principalities or powers, all things were created by him and for him*.

Which last words do likewise effectually refute another error advanced upon this occasion; as if Almighty God, in making the world, had used the Son's cooperation in the quality of a servant or instrument only. For upon these terms, how true soever it might be that *all things were created by him*, yet could it not possibly be true, that *all things were created for him* too. Nor is it to be supposed that any holy man, speaking by divine inspiration, should address himself to one acting in an inferior capacity as the Psalmist hath done in a passage quoted here, *Thou, Lord, in the beginning hast laid the foundations of the earth, and the heavens are the work of thy hands; they shall perish, but thou endurest; and they all shall wax old as doth a garment; and as a vesture shalt thou fold them up, and they shall be changed; but thou art the same, and thy years shall not fail*. So natural is the inference from hence also, that the Son (as was hinted before) therefore rules the world, because he made the world; that he was in such a sense and manner the maker, as to be likewise the proprietor and rightful lord of it. And consequently that he acts not in subordi-

^a Heb. xi. 3.

^b Coloss. i. 16.

^c Ver. 10, 11, 12.

nation to any higher Being, but in assertion of his own prerogative, by maintaining and governing his own world.

This is yet farther confirmed by that description of him in the next words, that he is *the brightness of his Father's glory, and the express image of his person*. Upon which, not to philosophise with too bold a niceness, let it suffice to say, that the former of these characters (alluding to a luminous body, and comparing the Father to the original fountain of light, and the Son to the effulgence or ray streaming from it) seems intended to teach us, that the essence of both is the same; that the one is inseparable from, and not to be conceived without the other; consequently, that neither of them either ever was or could be alone. So that the Son is hereby declared to be of the same nature and eternity with the Father; and from hence more particularly the Church seems to have taken the occasion of confessing, in opposition to the Arian heresy, as we find it done in one of our creeds^d, that *Jesus Christ the only begotten Son of God was begotten of his Father before all worlds, that he is God of God, light of light, very God of very God, of one substance with the Father, by whom all things were made*.

But, lest so full a declaration of this unity of substance might be unwarily or perversely made a foundation for inferring from thence an unity in all other respects whatsoever; the latter of these characters resembles him to an *imago* or impress of his Father's excellencies. Now, since in all created beings the thing which makes and that which receives the impression hath each a distinct subsistence of its own; so is it also in the case before us. Not so indeed as in created beings, where these two things differ in nature and substance also; but so far thus as can consist with the character given just before. Which, having affirmed the nature and duration of these two to be exactly the same, must needs forbid us, from this other character to draw any consequences destructive of or any way disagreeable to the former. And therefore, having already established the unity of nature, in the similitude of original and derived light, the apostle might safely make use of another similitude, which (following after and taken in conjunction with that) could not possibly extend farther than to a distinction of person. And thus he hath likewise obviated the heresy of Sabellius, by affirming the Father and Son to have the same godhead, glory, and majesty; but at the same time intimating that they have not the same personality. In a word, that though the Father and the Son be one God, and in that respect there be no difference in nature or time or degree; yet the Father is not the Son, nor the Son the Father. And in this respect there is a just and very material distinction of order and dignity, mutual relation, and manner of subsisting.

There is indeed another reason for these expressions with regard to us, and they belong most strictly to our blessed Saviour; not

^d Creed commonly called Nicene.

only as he is of the same divine nature and glory with the Father; but as by Him the excellencies of that nature and glory are most clearly manifested to the world. For never were the wisdom, the power, the holiness, the justice, and, above all, the goodness of God, so conspicuous, as in the preaching, the miracles, the life and death, the resurrection and exaltation of the adorable Jesus. So that St. John had reason to say, in allusion to the marks of God's special presence in the Jewish tabernacle and temple, ** We beheld the glory of the Word made flesh, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father*; and St. Paul, that *God who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined into our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face (or person) of Jesus Christ*. But still this is such a glory, as could not have shined upon us, had it not been the same with that of the Father; and this is therefore the effect of our Lord's divine, but could not possibly proceed from his human nature.

As little is it to be conceived, that to this human nature, and no other, should be ascribed that governing and preserving providence, attributed to the Son in those next words, that he *upholdeth all things by the word of his power*. Since no Being less than that which made the world is capable of sustaining and continuing the order of the world. And therefore, though this be now done by the Son, who is man as well as God, yet is it truly and properly the work of that divine nature, which was from all eternity at the right hand of the Father; not of that human nature, which, being united to, and from thenceforth inseparable from the divine, is now together with it exalted thither, as a reward of those sufferings, and that expiatory sacrifice for the sins of mankind, which that union rendered of merit as invaluable, as the condescension of it is inexpressible.

One argument more the apostle here makes use of to prove the excellence of this author of the new covenant; and that is, the manifest precedence given to him in the Old Testament above the most glorious of all created beings, the blessed angels. The proof whereof consists in sundry passages, acknowledged by Jewish authors themselves to belong to the Messiah; who is, in a sense and manner peculiar to himself, entitled *the Son of God*; while the angels are allowed no higher a denomination than that of ministers and servants^b. Nay, and to shew the mighty distance and disparity between them, those very angels are all of them commanded to *worship* this Son. A homage, to which nothing less could give him right, than his being their Creator, and they his creatures. At other times we find him represented as a righteous Kingⁱ, possessed of an everlasting dominion, and invested with such distinguishing honours, as none, even the highest and most peculiar favourites of heaven, were or may ever hope to be dignified with. And once more, not only the creation of the world, but the dissolution of it also, is expressly declared to be his doing^k; while yet the utmost attributed to the angels amounts to no more, than their being instruments in the hand of God; and

^a John i. 14.

^f 2 Cor. iv. 6.

^g Ver. 5.

^b Ver. 6, 7.

ⁱ Ver. 8, 9.

^k Ver. 10. to the end of the chapter.

performers of such good offices to those who love and serve him, as he, who hath constituted the services of all his creatures in a wonderful order, hath thought fit to assign them in the protection of good men and the government of the world.

Now these were arguments very fit to be used to the Hebrews in particular; because the Jews, from whose religion they had lately been converted, appear to have borne a greater reverence to, and to have ascribed much more to the angels in the making of the world particularly, than their Scriptures had any where given them warrant to do. They had *received their law*, as St. Stephen expresses it, *by the disposition of angels*; their fathers were conducted by them from Egypt to the promised land; they had been blessed with many signal deliverances by their interposition; had been favoured with many visions and revelations of great importance by these messengers; and had the oracles of God, and his special presence exhibited to them, upon extraordinary emergencies, by spirits appearing in this form. What then could be more seasonably urged upon persons of such principles and privileges, in honour of the Christian dispensation, than a proof, that its author was not only superior to the angels, but infinitely their superior? So that the excellence even of those noble beings above the very vilest is not to be named with that of Christ above them. In one case, the difference is only in place and degree, some are in higher, some in lower stations, but still all fellow-servants and fellow-creatures. In the other, we have no foundation for so much as a comparison; but servants and their Lord, creatures and Creator, the humblest adoration and the most absolute dominion. So distant are the dispensers of these two revelations; and consequently so small, even none at all, is the glory of the former, when set against the latter, which, in this respect, excelleth all others in glory.

The result then of my second head is this, that the Gospel claims a just preeminence above any other revelation of God's will to mankind; because, not only the first and remote declarer, but the immediate publisher and dispenser of it, was a person truly and strictly divine. So that when God spoke to our forefathers by the prophets, it was by men, who in all points (their particular inspiration excepted) stood upon the level with those they spoke to. But when he spoke to us by his Son, he spoke by himself, and without the ceremony of an inferior messenger. An honour and advantage this to us, a kindness and condescension in him, which at all times deserves to be considered, but at this festival especially should be remembered with the most zealous expressions of wonder and praise. And, for the more effectual exciting these affections in our minds, I did propose to leave the two heads, already treated of, with some reflections suitable to the solemnity of the day, and the substance of this Epistle. But this discourse having already exceeded its just measure, and the Gospel furnishing matter to which they will be no less applicable, I rather choose to reserve them for the close of the whole, and offer

them there entire; than to divide such meditations, between two passages of Scripture, which seem to have each a fair, if not an equal title to them.

THE GOSPEL. St. John i. 1—15.

1 *In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.* 1. Before time or the world was, the *Word* (a title understood by the generality of the Jews, and many heathens of that and former ages, to denote a divine Person) had a being; and did exist inseparably with God, yea and was himself literally and truly God.

2 *The same was in the beginning with God.* 2. Yet was not this Person the whole Godhead, but, because he did from all eternity exist in and from another Person in this Godhead, therefore it is that I affirm him to have been so with God, that there was never any time in which God was and the Word was not.

3 *All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made.* 3. Nor did he only never begin to be himself, but he was the cause and author of being to all things else; so that, whatever in heaven or in earth, visible or invisible, is or ever was, which is not God; this Word was, in the strictest and properest sense of that expression, the maker and creator of it.

4 *In him was life; and the life was the light of men.* 4. All things indeed subsist and live by him, but mankind do so in the most excellent sense and manner. For to them he is the author of eternal life. And the discovery of and way to this is the true, the best, and only valuable knowledge, with which the minds of men are enlightened.

5 *And the light shineth in darkness; and the darkness comprehended it not.* 5. A light communicated to an ignorant and wicked world, but their minds are so darkened with prejudices and passions, that they refuse and are never the better for it.

6 *There was a man sent from God, whose name was John.* 6. Not that there was any want of evidence, had they been rightly disposed to receive it. For he had the testimony of John Baptist in particular, whose authority could not be denied to proceed from God.

7 *The same came for a witness, to bear witness of the Light, that all men through him might believe.* 7. And yet the very end he was sent for is no other than to testify that this Person was he, in whom men ought to believe, and to prepare them for doing so.

8 *He was not that Light, but was sent to bear witness of that Light.* 8. It is evident from the whole course of John's ministry, that he was not, or ever pretended to be, that teacher upon whose doctrine men were to depend for eternal salvation. No, his business was to declare and lead people to him.

9 *That was the true Light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world.* 9. And therefore they, who value themselves most upon being John's disciples, must know, that whatever advantages of this kind any man ever did or can attain to, are all to be had from him whom John witnessed to, and from him only.

10 *He was in the world, and the world was made by him, and the world knew him not.* 10. And such advantages men never wanted some measures of, and opportunities for; in regard that there were always some visible footsteps of his providence and grace in this his own world; but these the generality of mankind attended not to, though both created and preserved and governed by him.

11 *He came unto his own, and his own received him not.* 11. Nay, which is yet a more lamentable instance of perverseness and stupidity, even the Jews, a people favoured with particular revelations of his will, and made his peculiar, did yet reject him, when he came and conversed among, and applied himself more especially to them.

12 *But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name.* 12. All did not thus receive him indeed, and they who received him (by which is meant the belief of and obedience to his doctrine) found their account in it. For on all such he bestowed that most valuable privilege of being the children of God.

13 *Which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.* 13. A relation founded, not in any natural descent, like those which are contracted by material principles conveyed, and sensual inclination gratified; or, (as others,) not in the blood shed at circumcision, and a ritual law, nor in the virtue of any thing men can do by improving their natural reason and living up to its best principles; but wholly owing to God, whose mercy, for the sake of this *Word*, adopts us as his own, and, by the grace of his Holy Spirit, begets us to a new and better life, and draws us to a likeness of himself. The method of conferring which privilege is no less wonderful than the privilege itself.

14 *And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth.* 14. This divine Person, the *Word*, of whom I have hitherto been speaking, the more effectually to impart these blessings to the world, took the human into his divine nature, became mortal man, and conversed among us. The perfections of God in the mean while residing in and shining forth out of this tabernacle of his flesh, as evidently as over the presence of God was manifest from the ark heretofore. (Insomuch that no person less than the only Son of God, of the same nature with his Father, could do what he did.) His glory indeed far excelling that other, as exhibiting to us far greater mercies than the Levitical dispensation. Such were pardon in full for all evil things, from which men could not

be justified by the law; and the substance of those good things, of which that had only the types and shadows.

COMMENT.

THE Gospel for this festival pursues the same design with the Epistle, by leading us to infer the excellence of the Christian dispensation from that of its Author. And, as there he was represented by *the brightness of God's glory, and the express image of his person*; so is he here, by *the Word of God, the necessary emanation, the exact image of the divine mind, and the Light* which, from that source of all light, is by him reflected upon men. There he was styled *the maker of the worlds, and the upholder of all things by the word of his power*: here it is declared that he *made all things, and that in him, in him alone, is life*. Only, whereas the author to the Hebrews contents himself with shewing that the Person by whom God *hath spoken to us in these last days* is his own Son, of the same divine nature and perfections with himself; St. John does treat this subject more fully, by shewing that this person, of the same nature with the Father, hath not disdained to be made of the same nature with us too.

And this is the true intent of St. John in the portion of Scripture now before us. It is not to prove *the Word* a person, no, nor a divine person, no, nor yet the maker of all things; these were notions very familiar to the Jews, as is plain from the Chaldee paraphrasts, which, in those ages, were the Scriptures read in their synagogues publicly. Nor was it necessary for the Gentiles to be told this, many of whose philosophers had mentioned the *Λόγος*, or *Word*, as inseparable from the Deity, and the cause and artificer of all things. So that thus far the evangelist neither expressed himself in any uncouth terms, nor affirmed any thing new. But that which lay upon him to prove, for the instruction and conviction of both these sorts of men, was, that this divine *Word* did come into the world, and converse among and enlighten mankind with those discoveries of truth and salvation contained in the Gospel; and did do and suffer all those wondrous things related there at large in the person of our Redeemer. And the making this good was the proper, the only course, for answering the main end of writing this Gospel. Which, we are told, was intended to confute the errors of Cerinthus, and such other heretics, as held our blessed Saviour to be a mere man, but denied his divinity and existence before his being born of his mother and appearing in the world.

A doctrine effectually overthrown by proving *the Word*, which had a being from all eternity, and made all things, and consequently was very God, to be the same that afterwards dwelt in human flesh; and which from thenceforth existed no longer as a divine Person separate and alone, but as God and man both, known by the name and character of Jesus Christ. The truth of whose divinity having been, I hope, sufficiently cleared in my last discourse, I shall only take notice now of some few particulars which did not fall within the compass of

the Epistle for this day, and then proceed to such reflections as both that and my present subject suggest to us.

And first, we have here an account from whence mankind received all that prerogative of reason and knowledge, by which they are distinguished from, and advanced above, the inanimate and brute parts of the creation. Those notices of God, of good and evil, of their duty in this, and their existence in a future state, and whatever else it is wherein the primitive brightness of man's understanding and rectitude of his will consisted, all were derived from this Word, the fountain of life: so that to him we stand indebted for all the natural as well as supernatural wisdom we ever were possessed or capable of. All was a ray darted upon the soul by this *brightness of his Father's glory*; all an impress of this *image of his person* stamped upon a creature formed after his own likeness: and all this, with the greatest propriety, styled *the life and light of men*, because such knowledgo is the guide to, the ground of immortality; the very thing by which our souls subsist, or can attain to the happiness prepared for them, as the proper and ultimate end of their creation.

2. In the next place we may observe the operations of this divine Word, in man's depraved state, described by a *light shining in darkness*, and *the darkness not comprehending it*, by *being in the world*, and *the world not knowing even him by whom it was made*. Whereby we are given to understand both the misery of that state and the cause of it. The former is intimated in the word *darkness*, the latter in *the light not being comprehended* by that darkness. From both which put together we are led to conclude, that even in the most benighted ages of the world this Sun of righteousness did not cease to shine; and if the effect of that shining was so woefully small, as in some places and times it must, to the great reproach of human nature, be confessed to have been; the reason is, because the light he shed was broken and shut out by the follies or the vices, that thick impenetrable night, which men had, by neglect of God first, and then by industry and custom in evil-doing, made about their own minds. And this is what not only they might do then, but may even now or at any time do, by searing their consciences, stupifying their senses, blinding their eyes, and sinning away their very first principles, all regard for, all distinction between moral good and evil. In the mean while this divine Word was, in all ages and under every dispensation, shedding his light in such measures and by such methods as his own infinite wisdom saw expedient. He was the source of all that light men at any time enjoyed, to guide themselves in the way to immortality by; of all that which they did, and of all that too, which either through their weakness or their wilfulness they did not receive.

3. How great a part this last cause had in the common calamity and corruption of mankind is very evident from the tenth and eleventh verses. The former observing so wretched a degeneracy as kept the world in ignorance of the very Author of their being, by not attending to those visible footsteps of a divine power and providence, of which a moderate consideration of natural causes and effects, and the

order and government of the universe, was capable of preserving a constant and reverent sense. The latter exposing the particular disingenuity of that unpersuadable people, to whom this *Word* made nearer approaches of kindness, and more liberal communications of himself and his will, than to any other; and all this to little other effect than to render the guilt and ingratitude of being shamefully repulsed, by them who ought to have been most forward to entertain him, so much the more notorious and inexcusable. From all which taken together, the account given here what this divine *Word* is in his own nature; what he was, and how he exhibited himself to mankind in their first estate; what to the generality of them in their fallen condition, and what to the Jewish nation in particular; we are abundantly instructed where to lay the blame of their wickedness, and how it came to pass that no larger improvements were made of all the advantages and opportunities of knowing and doing better: viz. the *Word* and his *light* were always present with them; but that they who might, yet did not, would not, see and walk by it; and that, even when this *light* shone brightest, and this *Word* conversed most familiarly among men, it was not a favour wholly new, but only a different and clearer manifestation of himself. This degree and manner of it was indeed reserved for that and after-ages, who were taught by the *Word* incarnate; but the *Word*, though not incarnate, was a teacher common to every age. And consequently, it was *always* the condemnation that *men loved darkness rather than light*; though the times of the Gospel, after this *Word* being made *flesh*, have this peculiar aggravation of their crimes, that the evil of their deeds is an opposition against the strongest light; and so their love and preference of darkness is more affected and obstinate than that of any who had gone before them.

4. In the mean while there wanted no encouragement to men's better behaviour in this respect. Quite contrary. The terms on which he offered his guidance were such, that they who refused him refused their own highest honour and happiness. For, *as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God*. What honour, what happiness can be comparable to that of being the sons of God? related, in so near and tender a capacity, to a Father so powerful, so holy, so wise, so good, that it is not possible for the wants or even the wishes of any child of his to extend to any measure of things necessary or profitable, which will not find itself fully answered, infinitely exceeded, both by his ability and inclination to supply them? And therefore, when we have stretched our thoughts to the utmost length in representing the greatness of this privilege, they will at last be forced to step so far short of its dignity, that the most becoming way of contemplating the goodness of this Father, and the felicity of these children, will be to sit down full of thanks and wonder, and to cry out with St. John, *Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God!*

5. And yet we shall perhaps find cause to abate of our wonder, that this inestimable privilege should not, that any thing indeed should be, thought too much for us, after that still more amazing miracle of mercy which this scripture propounds in the last place to our consideration; *the Word being made flesh, and dwelling among us, and manifesting forth his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, &c.* Than which account, as none can in reason be desired more expressive of this *Word* subsisting really and actually in our human substance and form, so is it admirable to observe the decorum of the apostle's style upon that occasion, and how it is suited to the majesty of the Person that did so. For having spoken all along of *the Word* as eternal and truly divine, and coming now to speak of his existing in a different manner from what he had done heretofore, to take off all suspicion of his being degraded by that condescension, he makes use all along of phrases well known to the Jews, and such as plainly allude to those appearances under the Old Testament which they acknowledged to belong to the true God only, intimating that the same Divinity which then filled their tabernacle and ark of the testimony, had now chosen a human body for his tabernacle. And as he then exhibited himself to their fathers by a shining glory, and other miraculous tokens of his presence, so was this same presence rendered sufficiently conspicuous in this other tabernacle, by such distinguishing characters and wonderful operations as proved the Person bearing and doing them to be truly divine. Here then is the subject of astonishment, never to be sufficiently admired and adored, that we should not only be exalted to be the children of God, but that the Son of God should vouchsafe to become the Son of man, thereby to make us the sons of God: here the foundation of our faith is a privilege, which otherwise it had been the highest presumption to entertain a thought of, had not he united our nature inseparably to his own, and, by taking part with the adopted, admitted them to a part with the only begotten.

Thus much shall suffice for the observations intended to be raised from this scripture. It only remains now, that the whole be concluded with some reflections proper to the subject and the solemnity of this day.

1. And first, to begin, where the Epistle for this festival does, with the advantage of being *spoken to* or taught by the Son of God above that allowed to those ages heretofore, who were instructed by his prophets. This may appear in sundry, but particularly in these following respects:

(1.) In the sufficiency and qualifications of our Teacher, superior to those of any other person at any time delegated to this office. This is what St. John hath observed in those very remarkable texts to this purpose: "*No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him: and again, He whom God hath sent speaketh the words of God: for God*

giveth not the Spirit by measure unto him: to which we may add a third, delivered by our blessed Saviour concerning himself; *¶ No man hath ascended up into heaven, but he that came down from heaven, even the Son of man which is in heaven.* The most exquisite happiness mankind are designed for, or are capable of, consists in a resemblance first, and then an enjoyment of God. But it is necessary first to know the excellencies of that object we labour to resemble. This, when God is our object, is what no strength of our own faculties can enable us to do. For he dwells in *light* and *glory inaccessible*; and therefore all the approaches we make towards him are owing to those communications he is graciously pleased to make of himself to us. The persons he makes use of as his instruments to this purpose can impart to others only in such proportions as he had imparted to them; and all his distributions of this kind to any mere man, as they are limited by other reasons and ends best known to his own wisdom, so must they in the nature of the thing be bounded by the capacity of the receiver; which, in the very noblest and most comprehensive of created beings, must be infinitely too narrow to take in the perfections of God as they are. Now this is the peculiar advantage of the Son of God, that he is in *his Father's bosom*, *sees him as he is*, hath the *fulness of the Spirit in himself*, is the *Wisdom and Word of the Father*, inseparable from him, and therefore, even then, when he came down to teach and converse with men upon earth, was still in heaven, the same God continuing there, while manifested in the flesh as man here. This then is our security, that, as knowledge is the very life of the soul, the seed of immortality and bliss in us, we are provided with a Teacher whose abilities are above any defect; and, if good care be taken not to be wanting to our own improvement, we cannot fail of becoming *wise unto salvation*, when enjoying the benefit of being instructed by that Teacher, who is at once the perfection and the fountain of all wisdom.

2. By means of such a teacher we have an effectual prevention against two very great and very common inconveniencies, proceeding from two the most distant affections of mind towards our spiritual guides.

(1.) The one is, having their persons and parts in undue admiration. Which gives mistaken or designing men a mighty opportunity of propagating their own errors or interests or passions together with the truth; and of leading, even whither they please, those who have blindly delivered up their souls to their direction. How powerfully this principle sometimes operates, and what pernicious effects it hath, if daily fresh instances did not convince us, yet that of the Jews in our Saviour's time is but too evident a proof: who, content to shut their own, and see altogether with the eyes of their masters, thought it sufficient to bear them out in their obstinacy, that *¶ not any of the rulers or of the Pharisees had believed on him.* Nor is there danger in this so absolute deference to the judgment of others, only when they

happen to be corrupt and against the truth, but even at such times as they are most sincere and zealous for it. For men are still but men, and, as such, liable to ignorances and infirmities. So that the devoting ourselves entirely to the very best of these is a sort of idolatry, a setting up creatures in the place of the Creator, and making them, to us who do so, the authors and givers of those doctrines and precepts, which it is their business only to inculcate and expound, and ours to receive. To receive, not because they teach them us, but because God, who alone hath authority and dominion over the consciences of men, teaches us by their ministry; and therefore all they say obliges us so far as it is agreeable with the will of God, and no farther. Remarkable to this purpose is that caution of St. Paul to the Corinthians, *To the married I command, yet not I, but the Lord; but to the rest speak I, not the Lord*: thus distinguishing between a thing imposed as a necessary duty, and that which was only recommended as prudent and seasonable advice; and informing us thereby, that even from persons miraculously enlightened and assisted by the Holy Ghost, all they deliver is not to be received alike. Even those illuminations and assistances were limited to certain measures and occasions; and consequently the respect due to these very persons might be guilty of excess, if no difference were made between what was uttered by the dictates of the Spirit, and what they spake as the sense of their own minds. But now, by the Son of God vouchsafing to speak to us by himself, we are secured against all manner of ill consequences that might grow from the want or the difficulty of making such distinctions. The inclination so natural to us, of tacking ourselves too close to wise and good men, and overrating the outward and immediate instruments of our knowledge and virtue is here not rooted out, but conducted safe; by fixing it upon one, who always was the inward and remote, but hath at last been pleased to make himself the next and visible instructor of mankind. Thus hath he given the same absolute authority to a teacher like ourselves, which was due to none but God; and could not before be ascribed to the greatest and holiest of the same nature with ourselves. Here can be no defect of understanding or judgment; no indirect end or subtle design of misleading us; no interval or instant of the Holy Ghost ceasing to operate; no one word merely human, in him who cannot speak any other than the words of God; no measure or confinement upon him, in whom *are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge, and all the fulness of the Godhead dwelleth bodily*. And therefore in this, this single case, we may safely indulge our affections to a visible guide; believe and obey without any manner of reserve; and ought most thankfully to adore that kind condescension to our weakness, which, finding it so very hard to disengage itself from sensible, and fix upon objects spiritual and unseen, for its hope and trust, is now relieved by those approaches of God to us, which we could not have made to him. By those drawings with the cords, so suitable to our temper, which have left us at liberty to

devote our every faculty to, and have made it a fault not to trust ourselves with the conduct of, a man. And this, without any robbery at all committed upon the prerogative of God, to which alone our unconditional belief and obedience are due.

(2.) Another extreme, directly opposite to the former, which greatly obstructs men's improvement in spiritual knowledge, is the contempt of their teachers. Especially when the meanness of their natural or acquired endowments, or the figure and character they bear in the world, tempt their people to treat them with scorn, and to proportion the regards due to their office by those false measures of their learning or their fortunes. This is a fault so very frequent, that no one who observes at all can be ignorant how unequally men carry themselves upon the account of such distinctions; what weight and influence honours and preferments give to every word of theirs who are recommended by them; and how neglected the soundest doctrine and the brightest virtue pass, where poverty and plainness, the want of countenance from great men, and a retired modest piety, make no show or noise abroad. 'It was hence that the apostles of our Lord, because illiterate and of low degree, were so despised as to be thought scarce worth the anger of the Jewish council. Hence that our Lord himself and his doctrines were by some thought sufficiently confuted by the reproach of his being the reputed son of a carpenter; and that his miracles had least effect in that country where his manner of life and worldly circumstances were most known. But then this was the case of such who *judged by the outward appearance only*, but never attended to the demonstrations of a Divine power, with which those doctrines came confirmed. The opening of blind eyes, unstopping deaf ears, loosing dumb tongues, restoring withered and supplying maimed limbs, reviving the dead, and commanding even graves to give back the bodies of which they for some days had kept possession, putting evil spirits to flight, and extorting from devils themselves a confession of that truth which of all others they were most loath to have believed; these were much more than a balance against any outward disadvantages of person and condition. By many of these the apostles, who acted in the quality of servants only, got above the prepossessions and the malice of their adversaries: by all these, and by many, by infinitely more evidences of a Divine power, but particularly by that authority and commanding influence which proved this to be a power not only assisting and working with him, but inherent in and essential to him, our blessed Lord did right to the majesty of one nature even in the lowest orb of the other. This was *the glory which manifested itself to be the glory of the only begotten of the Father*. And though all men did not even thus behold and acknowledge it, yet all who did must needs honour and adore it. The apostle allows of the vilest and most obstinate wretches, that, *"had they known him, they would not have crucified the Lord of life and glory"*. And even now the only evasion men have to despise Jesus and his laws is by denying

^t Acts v. 13, 21; Matt. xiii. 55, 58; Mark vi. 3, 6.

^u 1 Cor. ii. 8.

either that he is God, or that those laws are his. But mankind never yet did, never can degenerate into such a monstrous absurdity of wickedness as seriously to confess their Teacher to be God, and at the same time to slight the person teaching them : because the perfection and majesty of God, even according to our notions of him, are so transcendently glorious, and so incomparably great, as, in the esteem of every reasonable man, not to be capable of diminution or blemish upon any account whatsoever. Let then the manner of God's appearing be what it will, yet still, if it be God that speaks, his every word not only ought to be, but by all who consider, and in good earnest believe this, will naturally be, received with honour and thankfulness, the deepest reverence, and most submissive awe.

Let us then, according to the apostle's advice, **see that we refuse not him that speaketh*, but remember that it is a speaker from heaven, and one who hath a right to all our attention and most strict observance. Let us with thankfulness embrace the mighty benefit of one whose knowledge knows no bounds ; and who, as he alone searches *all things, even the deep things of God*, so he of all others may be best depended upon for imparting to us such a measure of these as his Divine wisdom sees it convenient for us to know. Had servants of inferior capacity been equally able to instruct us, there had been no occasion for employing the Son. Had that Son, of abilities so peculiar for this purpose, wanted an inclination equal to his power, what reason can we render of his undertaking so charitable an office ? but especially, what account can we render of our own behaviour if we suffer this charity to have no effect upon us ? If we pretend to dispute the most authentic, to despise the fullest, to neglect the kindest declaration of the Divine will ; a declaration made by God himself to set it above all possible suspicion of mistake or forgetfulness, of fraud or frailty, or any of the too many evasions and excuses which wicked men so often had, and might again have found, to extenuate their disobedience, had this message been trusted to another hand : and a message every way worthy (so far as any thing can be so) of that King of heaven who condescended to deliver it himself. And shall we then pay less regard to the Son than all, but the profligate and profane, thought themselves bound to pay to the prophets ? Shall we deny to the Master and Lord a hearing and respect due to the meanest servant producing his commission ? The noblest and highest order of those servants, even the blessed angels, fall down and worship him ; and shall we, placed in a lower degree by nature, but, by his affection and tender love, in some sense preferred above them, not acknowledge and adore our gracious Benefactor ? *†The word spoken by those angels was steadfast, and every transgression against it received a just recompense of reward ;* and can we hope to escape unpunished if the great salvation begun to be spoken by their and our common Master and King shall be neglected ? at least, if it shall be neglected by us who call him *Master and Lord*, and, confessing him that hath spoken to be God,

* Heb. xii. 25.

† Heb. ii. 2, 3, 4.

shall yet, by the most absurd of all contradictions, so impiously overturn our own principles as not to *do the things* that he *hath said*? When the law was promulged in lightnings and clouds and thick smoke, by trumpets and thunders and earthquakes, we find what terror and awe it struck into the hearers; and why was this, but from the sense that this was the voice of God? If then the same God now speak, and give us evidence sufficient that this is his voice also, is not the argument for our reverence and duty the same? The manner, it is confessed, of his publishing the new covenant differs; but it is to the person and his authority, not to any particular method of manifesting the one or the other, that our obedience is due. And yet, supposing that too, we may be bold to say, that, in this latter dispensation of the Gospel, there are some circumstances of peculiar force, and even more engaging, than any at the publication of the Law. Which I hope to make appear by and by.

3. In the meanwhile I observe, in the third place, that we Christians have the advantage of a Teacher superior to all others, not only in regard of his own personal sufficiency, considered in himself as a Teacher; but as he is more, as he indeed is alone, capable of answering the ends of, and giving efficacy to the doctrines he came to teach us. The great ends which God seems to have intended the doctrine of his Gospel should serve are, the enlightening our minds and purifying our natures; letting us into a nearer view of a future state, and the incommunicable perfections of the Divine nature; and bringing us to a better likeness of those that are communicable. With regard to the former, *Jesus Christ is said to have brought life and immortality to light*, to have declared God, to have revealed those things of God which none could know, and consequently none could tell, but *the Spirit of God*: and many other passages we have to the like purpose. And who so fit, as *he that inhabiteth eternity*, to inform men what those things are which God hath prepared for them that love him? Who could command our belief of those mysterious truths which are too vast for mortals to comprehend with an authority equal to his, who, when he declared to us *what God is and does*, did only declare to us himself and his own actions? Of these, as it is plain no other could have, so is it no less plain he could not but have a clear and full understanding: but this is what was sufficiently spoken to before: that which I now would rather choose to make you sensible of is, our advantage in the latter of these purposes the Gospel is directed to, the exalting and purifying our nature, and so rendering us more like God in those of his perfections which may and ought to be imitated by us.

Now this is, in effect, only to refresh and restore that image of God upon our minds, in which man at first was made. And, as the defacing of that image by sin consisted not only in the bringing darkness upon our understanding, but irregularity and perverseness upon our will and affections; so, to retrieve it again, the informing our-

judgments cannot suffice without the will and the desires be influenced to embrace and act those things which we are instructed in the excellence of. We are taught in our excellent liturgy, when praying for a blessing upon our clergy and the people committed to their charge, to address to him in the style of an *almighty God, who alone worketh great marvels*; and very justly, since the Scripture hath told us, that *the preparations of the heart are from the Lord*, and that *Paul ploweth and Apollos watereth, but it is he that giveth the increase*. Men may scatter the spiritual seed, they may explain the word of truth diligently and faithfully, may reason strongly, exhort affectionately, rebuke courageously, enforce the obligations to a holy life, and expose the folly and danger of a wicked one very dexterously; but it is not in the power of all their industry and eloquence and zeal, to give one word they say its proper efficacy. They speak but to the air, and sow upon barren ground, till these outward teachings are set forward and seconded by the inward. They cannot dispose one of their hearers to consider and profit by their doctrine as they ought; nay, even those hearers cannot dispose themselves to this without the preventing and assisting grace of God. The creation to a spiritual as well as to a natural life, is a work peculiar to him; and therefore here is the incomparable preeminence of our Teacher, the Son of God, that he not only *spoke as never man spake*, but had the hearts of them to whom he spoke at his disposal; could influence and incline them as he saw fit, and by the secret operations of his Spirit purge and fit them for bringing forth that fruit which no human power could produce, which no prophet or apostle, though immediately inspired by God, could pretend to, which even his own divine discourses missed of, where he was not pleased to bestow that grace, without which not only ours, but his preaching was in vain, and every man's hearing is and must be in vain.

Let us therefore, with all possible thankfulness, acknowledge and set a just value on our inestimable privilege of *being taught by God*, without whom all other teaching signifies so very little. Let our wonder cease, that so many millions of souls should be so speedily converted to this faith; when convinced by miracles wrought in the power of that Spirit which he alone could send, and when drawn by him who alone could enable them to come. Let this abate of all unjust partialities to the very best of men, since it is not by our ministers, not by the most moving and powerful of these, that we improve in goodness; but by his working in us mightily. Let us ascribe to him the whole praise of that profiting by his word, which is entirely his own gift. And let us fervently and constantly pray, that he would soften and turn to his fear those hearts, which till he strike upon them are hard and impenetrable as a rock. A prayer, which we have all the reason in the world to believe he will not fail most graciously to accept and grant, who hath done so great things for us already. Those things particularly, whereof we rejoice at this holy festival:

when, in order to convey the word of God to us more effectually, the eternal and essential *Word of God* was himself *made flesh*. And this brings me to another sort of reflections, such as more immediately relate to the manner in which the Son of God vouchsafed to speak to us, even by becoming one of us. A mystery too deep to be explained; too awful to be boldly and curiously pried into; and then improved to the best purpose, when we receive it with reverence and humble faith, and endeavour to excite those pious affections which the sober and earnest contemplation of it hath a natural tendency to kindle and cherish, and keep up in every devout mind.

I. And first, how ought we to be filled with astonishment and holy wonder at this surprising and altogether new instance, which God hath given of his almighty power in the incarnation of his blessed Son! I call it surprising and altogether new, because so very different from all the other demonstrations of omnipotence at any time exhibited to the world. The distance between God and any, nay all created beings, is so vast, as to admit no manner of proportion to found the least shadow of a comparison upon. And therefore every action and dispensation of his which proclaims his excellence above these is less amazing, because more agreeable with the notions men naturally have of his infinite and incomprehensible greatness. But that God should *empty*, and as it were go out of *himself*; that the ancient of days, whose *outgoings have been from everlasting*, should be born in Bethlehem, a child not an hour old: that he who fills heaven and earth should be wrapped in *swaddling clothes*, and the majesty of the high and holy one *laid in a manger*; that he whom all the *angels worship* should vouchsafe to be made lower than the lowest of those ministering spirits who are commanded to pay him adoration; in a word, that the immortal and impassible Creator should take upon him the passions and frailties, the sufferings and mortality of his own creature; should begin to live, should grow, and be nourished, and hunger and thirst, and be weary and sleep, and be grieved and weep, and bleed and die, and in all points be tempted and afflicted like unto us; this is somewhat so exceeding foreign to the manifestations God hath used to make of himself, that it quite crosses our common apprehensions of him. That God could exalt himself beyond all measure, beyond all imagination, men who know any thing at all of him made no difficulty to believe; but that he could to such a degree abase himself, they never knew before. But when this act had taught them it, they could not but see that nothing less than omnipotence could bring about the miracles of this mysterious condescension. And we may say, with great truth, that the divinity of the *Word* is at least equally evident in his own being *made flesh*, as in *his making all things*. At least; for, could a power which is infinite admit of difficulties or degrees, we must conceive it harder for God to appear in the form of weakness, than to exert himself in the utmost activity and strength; *to make himself of no reputation, and be found in fashion as a man*, than

to glorify himself by the producing a whole world out of nothing; to become obedient to the death of the cross, and be murdered by his enemies, than to blast all that hate him with the breath of his displeasure, and command that whole world back to nothing in a moment. So stupendous, so unparalleled an example of the divine power does the incarnation of the Son of God present us with, above any work of creation or providence, or the most distinguishing miracles that ever were made use of to prove it to mankind.

2. Let us, in the second place, turn our thoughts upon the adorable wisdom of God in this wonderful mystery of his blessed Son's incarnation. A depth, which, St. Peter acquaints us, *"the angels continually desire to look into,* and take unspeakable delight in the contemplation of. How then can we sufficiently admire the management of our God? who, when mankind had estranged themselves from him, found out a method of drawing them near, and uniting them to him again, by condescending to unite himself to them in so close a manner as the taking the manhood into God: who, when they had defeated all the means formerly used for their instruction, by the ministry of his servants best qualified for that purpose, did not disdain this last and most powerful experiment of teaching them by himself; who considered their weakness and his own transcendent greatness so kindly, as to lay aside the terrors of his majesty, and the brightness of that glory which rendered him inaccessible; and to make it practicable for poor feeble mortals to see and approach and converse familiarly with him: who thus found out the most effectual way of reconciling us to, and quickening us in our duty, at once informing us by his doctrine, and leading us by his example; who debased himself to a participation of our infirmities, that he might sanctify them to us, support us under them, and prove that, all these notwithstanding, we are capable of being exalted to a participation of the divine excellencies; who, by this noblest of all stratagems, enabled that nature to gain a full and fair conquest over the enemy of souls, which had been so often vanquished, so proudly insulted, so long and mercilessly triumphed over, and trampled under by him before: who, by being born of a woman, hath begotten mankind again to a lively hope, and forbidden us to distrust God and man being made one in peace and affection; whom we have seen already made one in the same person: in short, who hath offered an atonement, which cannot but be sufficient and effectual to satisfy for sin, since the victim, the sacrificer, and the Deity appeased are one. These and a great many other instances there be, which will occur to men who set themselves to meditate on this subject as they ought. Illustrious instances all, of the wonderful wisdom of God manifested in this scheme of our redemption. But the last does not only represent to us the *wisdom*; it leads us to observe withal,

3. Thirdly, the *justice* of God, so very conspicuous upon this occasion. Justice to his own honour and truth: who, after having

denounced misery and death as the deserved wages of wickedness, had thereby concluded all mankind under this fatal sentence, *in that all had sinned*; and so foreclosed himself from remitting the guilt and punishment, without a satisfaction made for the offences and outrages committed against him. Justice to his holiness: which being such as cannot but hold all iniquity in the utmost detestation, he hath thus declared, how irreconcilable his hatred to it is, by refusing to accept any satisfaction of less value, than that of the blood and bitter sufferings of his own blessed and co-eternal Son. Justice to the authority of his own most righteous laws, by representing to all the world how highly they are concerned to obey them, and what unspeakable torments they must expect, who are themselves wilful and impenitent offenders; since it cost him so dear to redeem their souls, who himself knew no sin, but only sustained the person, and vouchsafed to stand in the place of sinners. Justice, lastly, even to the author and promoter of all wickedness and injustice, the tempter and destroyer of souls: who by contriving the wrongful death of him, in whom he found nothing, is thus most equitably ojected out of all that pretended right, which the guilt of human nature might seem to have given him over the polluted rest that partake of it. Thus from the instant of his being subdued by a man, the devil had that prey and those slaves wrested out of his hands in fair and open combat, which he had basely and treacherously gotten by deceiving and subduing man before*. Thus did it please God to proceed with this basest of all enemies, not by a stretch of absolute and arbitrary power and violence; but, in a method of judgment and equity, overthrowing his tyranny and rescuing his captives; giving this before wretched and conquered nature an opportunity of retrieving in the second Adam what it had lost in the first; and carrying the influence of Christ's righteousness as far as that of our first parents' transgression. Most justly: in regard each was the representative of all mankind; and therefore, as the guilt and punishment of the former descends upon the whole offspring, who by a natural and carnal birth were in him, so does the obedience of the latter upon as many as are related to and conformed with the likeness of Christ, and so are in him too by a second and spiritual birth. All which contributes more than can be expressed or imagined to the magnifying another of the divine excellencies, which we cannot think at all, and not observe the particular glories of, and (if such comparisons between the perfections of God be allowable) its eminency above all the rest in the contrivance of this mystery. I mean,

4. Fourthly, his goodness and mercy. Of which I must say, as lately of his power, that, though every event, each design and act of providence, be so many fresh instances of it, yet never was there any fit to be named;—any, did I say? no, not all taken together are worthy to be put into the balance with this before us. It was indeed the effect of infinite goodness, that the world was made in such wonderful beauty

and order; but how much of the benefit intended by this creation had been lost, if, when sin had brought in mortality and misery, one of its chief inhabitants, to whose comfort and convenience so many parts of it were designed to minister, had been left to perish; and so to find his state in this dwelling converted into not only a dismal black scene of present and grievous, but a certain passage to eternal and unspeakably more grievous sufferings and sorrows! Let the men of metaphysics argue as they please from topics of mere nature; yet sure no man of sense who believes revealed religion can so refine and abstract his notions, as not to suppose it infinitely better for mankind never to have been at all, than to have been upon such terms as these; and therefore the creation, as matters quickly stood with us, was a blessing in no degree comparable to our redemption, our second and so much better creation. It deserves also to be acknowledged as a distinguishing mark of the divine favour, that we should be at first created in the likeness of God; but what proportion is there between that, and the restoring to us that likeness when most unhappily lost, by a kindness so amazing as that of God being made in the likeness of man? to his putting on our passions and frailties, that we might rise to his perfections; subjecting himself to our necessities and wants, that we might receive of his fulness; promoting us to honour by suffering indignities; and opening to us a way to happiness and life, and a kingdom everlasting, by a life of afflictions, a death of exquisite torture, and the voluntary scandal of an ignominious cross? And all this done for creatures, who, as such, could add nothing to their Creator's honour; for sinners, who, as such, had done their utmost to dishonour him; for rebels and traitors, false to all their obligations of duty, unthankful to their only Benefactor, disloyal to the best of Lords, and wilful destroyers of their own selves; wretches, who had deserved the hottest of his indignation, and the most dire effects of his hatred irreconcilable. In short, this is a subject which the farther we enter into the consideration of, the less we shall find ourselves able to speak of as we ought. It is a blessing better felt than expressed. For though its copiousness be such as to furnish matter for endless enlargement, yet to them who have attained to any tolerable sense of *what*, for *whom*, and especially *by whom* this miracle of mercy hath been wrought, it will be regarded as a mystery of love for which the tongues of men and of angels are insufficient. A mystery which none but he who wrought can fully know, and a nearer and more distinct view whereof is reserved for one principal ingredient of that happy state hereafter, which it was intended to advance us to.

How then ought we to approach our new-born Saviour, and what is the welcome proper to be given to the returns of this most happy day; the day that begat us to life immortal, the birthday of our happiness and all our hopes; the day that brought *light to them that sat in darkness*, comfort to them who lay grovelling in despair, mercy to the penitent, and pardon to the condemned?

1. Surely we should now endeavour to raise our souls by a most

strong and lively faith in the promises of the Gospel. For how glorious soever these may be, or how unworthy of them soever our sinful selves, yet can they not possibly be so far above our meanness as that human nature taken to assure them to us is below the majesty of the God who took it. Well may we then cry out with the Psalmist, *'Lord, what is man that thou makest such account of him, or the son of man that thou shouldst in so amazing a manner vouchsafe to visit him?'* Since therefore that hath been done already which so far exceeds the utmost we durst hope, all we could ask or think; what is there, can there be, yet behind, which we have reason to fear God will esteem too good for us? or, how *shall he not freely give us all things,* who hath loved us so tenderly, as *not to spare his own Son, but give this most precious of all gifts for us?*

2. Surely we are of all creatures most stupid and cold, if we do not, this day especially, feel our hearts inflamed with a most ardent love. A love, that shall carry us entirely to the object so highly deserving it, and dispose us to despise and hate every thing in comparison of him who hath set us this unparalleled example of kindness. A love, that shall think no return of service or hardship grievous, but cheerfully sacrifice every darling lust, consecrate every affection of our souls, devote every action of our lives, nay even those lives themselves, if need require, to him; who, to make us all his own, doubly his own, after having made us, did not disdain to be made and born and live as one of us, purely that he might be capable of dying to redeem us.

3. Surely we are not the disciples of him whose birth we celebrate, if our charity to men be not likewise as sincere, as universal, as our love to this God and Saviour is fervent and entire. For how shall we dare to exclude those whom God hath not excluded; how deny our prayers and good wishes, our best endeavours and kindest offices, where he hath extended his mercy in the highest instance that he was capable of shewing or they of receiving it? Are they strangers and aliens? He hath united us all to each other; and from the instant of God and man becoming one person, hath made all mankind one body in himself. Are they enemies who have provoked and unjustly offended us? Such, and much worse, were every one of us, when we were reconciled and saved by this wonderful love; whose peculiar commendation it is, that *while we were yet enemies, Christ was not only born, but died for us.* Are they inferiors, and looked upon as not worth our concern? That, above all objections, ought, on this day however, to be silent.

4. For surely we are obliged on this, above all other days, to be possessed with the profoundest humility. A grace at least as proper to the season as any hitherto insisted on. For never was vanity and pride so put out of countenance as by *'God taking upon him the form of a servant'*; never the pomp and grandeur of the world so vilified, as by the Lord of heaven and earth condescending to make his entry in

^f Psalm cxliv. 3.

^g Rom. viii. 32.

^h Rom. v. 8.

ⁱ Phil. ii. 7.

so poor a figure, and from a throne of glory stooping down to *swording clothes and a manger*; never the splendour and magnificence of courts and numerous trains and noble retinue set in a truer light than by the King of kings contenting himself with the ministry of his meek mother, and choosing to receive the first respects, and have his first presence composed of a few humble shepherds; never the true use of power more nicely taught, nor the cold neglects, the haughty arrogance and insolent abuses it is apt to tempt men to more effectually reproached, than by this proof, that God was then strongest when he put on the greatest appearance of weakness; and that the princes and great ones of this world are then most truly great, most like their glorious original above, when they think no condescension below them for a general good, when they do not look down from on high with disdain upon the poorest, the meanest, those who least deserve, at the same time that they most need their pity and relief. And who indeed can scorn or neglect the vilest of his fellow creatures when provoked by such a pattern of condescension before his eyes? For let the distance be as wide as fortune or station or birth, or even imagination, can make it, still can it carry no manner of proportion between Creator and creature, God and man. And let the kind office, or the love to be exercised be magnified never so much, still all is nothing in comparison of that God not *abhorring the womb of the Virgin*, and, that *he might deliver man* from misery, submitting to be made man, and to endure the same afflictions with those whom he took upon him to deliver. Faith then and love of God, universal charity, and unaffected humility, are the pious dispositions suited to this occasion. Such are the graces, such the ornaments with which every soul should be decked in this festival of peace and love. And ye, whose truly Christian spirits have thus put on Christ, come forth and prepare to meet your God in the kind approaches he makes towards you. Meet him first in your closets with fervent devotion and heavenly meditations. And when these more retired exercises of piety have wrought your souls up to a holy warmth, *Go your way into his gates with thanksgiving, and into his courts with praise*; there fan and cherish the holy flame your private thoughts have kindled by a zealous joining in the prayers of the church; by hearkoning to the story of this birth and all its circumstances with fixed attention and holy wonder; by carefully improving those sacred truths which the man of God shall find seasonable to be now inculcated; but, above all, by feeding and feasting upon the figures of that flesh which God, as at this time, clothed himself with for your sakes; and dedicating to him in most solemn manner every faculty and part of that nature which he not only came to satisfy for, but to sanctify; and hath acquired a full right to by this stupendous union with his own. When this is done, let no profane or worldly thoughts presume to mingle themselves with your religious ones; but give a truce to business and care, to grief and every disorderly and melancholy passion; and let this whole day be sacred to quiet and calmness of mind, to spiritual comforts and uninterrupted joys: joys in which your bodies may very

decently partake too by a more liberal provision than ordinary of those good creatures you are blessed with for their sustenance and refreshment. But take good heed that this liberality degenerate not into luxury and riot. And now, least of any time, be guilty of dishonouring that body, which the God of all holiness and purity vouchsafed to appear in the likeness of. No, let your plenty be made a virtue, by opening your hearts and hands wide to the necessities of those naked and hungry, for whom, as well as for you, the Saviour was born. And, so far as in you lies, let there be no sign of want, no crying or complaining in your streets to pollute the rejoicings of that blessed day, when the Lord of all began *to be made poor, that we, through his poverty, might be made rich.* Let no voice now be heard but that of psalms and hymns, and hearts making melody to the Lord. With such the angels brought him into the body; nor can we think it strange that they who conceive a fresh joy at the conversion of a single sinner should now publish their general joy at the salvation of a whole world set on foot. But strange it may very well be thought, if angels should sing, and men should be silent upon this occasion; if they should even overflow with gladness at the happiness of others, and we should express no feeling of our own. Once more, and to conclude all, remember that the calves of your lips, even when most devoutly offered, are not a sufficient sacrifice; but as this day was to Jesus, so let it be to you, the beginning of a new life. Remember he was made *the Son of man* to make us *the sons of God*; that none can receive the benefit of his being the former who do not themselves become the latter: and that none are the sons of God any farther than they make it their business to be *holy as their heavenly Father is holy.* In vain, alas! was this divine Babe born into the world, except he be likewise born in our hearts. In vain, did I say? nay, good were it for us that he had never been born, if we do not live up to the light this *Word* hath shed abroad, and follow the example this *Word made flesh* hath left us. Of such mighty importance, such absolute necessity it is, that we should aspire to his likeness, who hath so graciously condescended to ours; and *being made God's children by adoption and grace, should not this day only, but every day, be renewed by his holy Spirit.* A blessing which, as we are taught to ask in the solemn do-votions of this morning, so shall we not fail to receive, if this festival, and the joys of it, be rightly improved to the honour of him who, in marvellous compassion to poor lost man, came *as at this time* into his own world, and *took our nature upon him*, even Jesus Christ, the eternal and *only begotten Son of God*, the wonderful *Son of a pure virgin*; to whom with the Father and Holy Spirit, over one God, be all glory and thanksgiving, adoration and obedience, world without end. Amen.

ST. STEPHEN'S DAY.

THE COLLECT.

GRANT, O Lord, that, in all our sufferings here upon earth for the testimony of thy truth, we may ^astedfastly look up to heaven, and by faith behold the glory that shall be revealed; and, being filled with the Holy Ghost, may learn to love and bless our persecutors by the example of thy first Martyr ^bSaint Stephen, who prayed for his murderers to thee, O blessed Jesus, who ^cstandest at the right hand of God to succour all those that suffer for thee, our only Mediator and Advocate. Amen.

Acts vii. 55.

IN order to a clear understanding and due improvement of the portion of Scripture appointed for this festival, it will be expedient to premise somewhat concerning the occasion of it in particular, and the person whose martyrdom it relates, and the church enjoins us to commemorate.

The author of the book of Acts takes notice in his ^dsecond and fourth chapters, that, among other testimonies of the unanimity and charity of the first Christians, this was very remarkable, that they voluntarily parted with their property, and, to supply the present necessities of the church, brought their substance into one common bank; out of which distribution was made according to the needs of each believer. The difficulty of making this distribution to every one's content would naturally increase with the numbers of the parties concerned to receive it. This proved to be soon the case when converts of several sorts came in. The Grecians—such by birth^e, but proselytes to Judaism, (as some think,) or (as others) Jews by descent, but of the *'dispersion'*, (as they are elsewhere called,) and so using not the Syriac but the Greek language in their synagogues—thought an undue preference given to the Hebrew widows; and their complaints first ministered occasion to that order in the church which hath ever since continued under the title of deacons.

The end then which the apostles chiefly had in view, at the first institution of this order, was to appoint proper persons to assist them in the affairs of the church, particularly in the care of the poor, which now grew a burden too heavy for a few; and especially for those who had matters of greater importance upon their hands, from

^a Acts vii. 55.^b Ver. 60.^c Ver. 56.^d Acts ii. 44, 45; iv. 34, 35.^e Pearson Posth. Lect. i. v. p. 52.^f John vii. 35.^g Acts vi. 2, 3, 4.

which it was not fit this should be suffered to divert them. How far the commission then given to these persons extended, as to the performance of holy offices, is beside the design of this treatise to dispute. It shall suffice to observe that we have, in the eighth chapter of this book an account of one of them both preaching and baptizing in the absence of the apostles. The care taken in their qualifications for this office speaks it to have been esteemed of great importance to religion; and many are of opinion, that those who were now chosen into it were of the number of our Lord's seventy disciples.

Among these the first was the saint of this day. Whose zeal for the faith inflamed the envy of its adversaries, and engaged him in warm disputes with the members of the synagogues then at Jerusalem. These were not only places of public worship, but a sort of colleges and schools, where men were instructed in the law and traditions of the Jews. Who, being now dispersed in several foreign parts, had synagogues peculiar to their respective countries, in which the youth of such a district were educated. Five of these synagogues attack St. Stephen at once. Who, finding themselves unable to vanquish him in controversy, dealt with men of profligate consciences to accuse him of blasphemy; and then, in a tumultuous manner, bring him before the council, in order to obtain a formal sentence of condemnation against him.

The matter brought in charge, and that returned to it in his own defence, give us fair intimation what the subject in dispute between St. Stephen and the members of those synagogues, who contended with him, was. The arguments used by him against the perpetual obligation and necessity of the Mosaic institution, the accusers aggravate, by representing them as *blasphemous words against Moses and against God*. And the charge he had brought against the crucifiers of our Saviour, the vengeance he threatened them with for that sin, and the exhortations to submit to the Gospel-covenant, are in like manner loaded with that odious character of blasphemies against the temple and the law. For so they explain themselves, and ground their allegations upon this, chap. vi. 14, *We heard him say, that this Jesus of Nazareth shall destroy this place, and change the customs Moses delivered us*.

From this imputation of blasphemy St. Stephen vindicates himself, and at the same time supports the arguments charged with it by an historical account of the most memorable actions and events from Abraham down to Solomon. The design whereof is to shew that the law, for which they at this time expressed so fierce a zeal, as if no salvation could be attained any other way, could not possibly be of that weighty consequence and absolute necessity which they fondly imagined. And this proof may be reduced to these three reasons:

(I.) Because (as is plain from the history of Abraham and the patriarchs¹) their ancestors pleased and continued in the favour of God for more than four hundred years without it. Since therefore

^b Chap. viii. 5, 12, 35, 38.

ⁱ Chap. vi. 3; Pearson ubi supra.

^k Chap. vi. 11.

^l Chap. vii. 2-37.

these were God's peculiar and elect, before that law was given, it follows that this law could not be the covenant and dispensation for saving men exclusive of all others.

(2.) Because the very prophet, at whose hands they received the law, gave them ^m warning of another eminent prophet, whom God (in ages to come) would raise up from among them, *like unto him* (that is, a lawgiver too); and to whom every soul among them was commanded, upon pain of utter excision, to yield attention and obedience. Consequently, preaching the faith and obedience of Jesus, who was that very ⁿ Prophet, could not be blasphemy against God or Moses; but had a direct tendency to magnify both, by leading men to him whom God had decreed, and Moses had foretold, to be the Saviour of all them, and only them, who should submit to be taught by, and steadfastly place their hope and trust in him.

(3.) Because that law they now pretended so great reverence for was plainly insufficient to contain them in their duty^o; as appeared from the frequent relapses into rebellion and idolatry, which the prophets sharply reproached, and threatened with so many severe punishments. And all this, notwithstanding the presence of God perpetually among them, in the tabernacle first, and then in the temple; which yet they were not to suppose God so fond of as to spare from destruction, if the people's sins called for vengeance. And therefore, as the ancient prophets thought it no profanation of the law, or of that holy place, to denounce the abolition of the one and demolishing of the other; no more was it any in St. Stephen to declare the extirpation of the former, and the utter ruin of the latter, to a generation of men now ripe for destruction. Such as had not only imitated, but far exceeded the obstinacy and malice and barbarity of their forefathers. All which, as this holy man was about to shew in the process of his discourse, he seems to have been interrupted by the clamour and tumult of his adversaries; and thereupon raised to that indignation expressed at the fifty-first and following verses: and that in rebukes so smart and home that the guilty audience, not able to endure him any longer, broke out into all the marks of spite and rage and fury implacable. Under which how he behaved himself, and what this malice ended in, the portion of Scripture appointed for the Epistle is intended to acquaint us.

THE EPISTLE. Acts vii. 55.

55 *Stephen, being full of the Holy Ghost, looked up steadfastly into heaven, and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing on the right hand of God.* 55. Stephen was so far from being discouraged at these expressions of rage against him, that, animated with the comforts of the Holy Spirit, he lifted up his eyes and heart to heaven; and had a vision vouchsafed unto him, representing clearly the majesty of God, encompassed with his holy angels; and that

^m Ver. 37, 38.

ⁿ See Deut. xviii. 15, &c.

^o Ver. 39-50.

^p Ver. 51-55.

Jesus, whose cause he had pleaded, and for which he was about to die, exalted as God-man to the same majesty, and in a posture of readiness and power to succour and receive him.

56 *And said, Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of man standing on the right hand of God.*

56. This vision, so graciously afforded for his support, he boldly declares to

the assembly before whom he then stood.

57 *Then they cried out with a loud voice, and stopped their ears, and ran upon him with one accord.*

57, 58. At the hearing whereof, they unanimously exclaimed against him, and by stopping their ears, expressed their utmost detestation of the horrible blasphemy they pretended

58 *And cast him out of the city, and stoned him: and the witnesses laid down their clothes at a young man's feet whose name was Saul.*

him guilty of, in affirming a man, whom he confessed to have been lately put to death, now to be glorified, and to reign with God in heaven. And, looking upon his own words as a sufficient confirmation of the crimes before alleged against him: they gave a loose to their zeal, dragged him with violence out of their city, (as was usual in the execution of impious malefactors,) and went to inflict on him the death prescribed in the law for blasphemers and seducers to idolatry. Which, that they might do with more expedition and dexterity, the witnesses, who by the law were to have the first hand in the execution, (a ceremony importing the truth of their testimony, and a taking upon themselves the guilt of the blood shed thereupon, in case it were false; and therefore wisely ordained to make men very cautious what they deposed in evidence,) stripped, and committed their clothes to the custody of a young man (afterwards a zealous preacher, but now a bitter persecutor of the Christian faith) called Saul; who thus declared his consent and concurrence in that wicked and bloody fact.

59 *And they stoned Stephen, calling upon God, and saying, Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.*

59. Then the witnesses first, and afterwards the people, cast stones at this

good man, who in the mean time continued to express the greatness of his faith in that Saviour for whom he suffered, by commending to his care and custody that soul, which, though now about to be separated from, yet he knew very well should not die with his body.

60 *And he kneeled down, and cried with a loud voice, Lord, lay not this sin to their charge. And when he had said this, he fell asleep.*

60. Nor was his charity less exemplary and wonderful than his faith. For he did, in most devout manner,

beseech God not to charge this sin to the account of them that slew him. And with these words in his mouth this first martyr died. A death which, in regard of the meekness and composure of mind he underwent it with, as well as the certainty of his resurrection to a better life, is rather to be called a sleep, in which the body lay down to rest a while, till it please God to awaken and unite it again to that soul which had put it off, and which in the mean time lives and acts in a separate state of bliss, prepared for the spirits of good men.

The time of this martyrdom is by some ^qplaced after our Lord's death about eight months, ^rby others at the distance of about four, by others again seven ^syears. Eusebius is express ^tthat it followed quickly after his election into the office of deacon; and from St. Chrysostom, and some others who speak in his honour, we are led to conclude that he was martyred young. The Scripture acquaints us farther, that his body was interred with solemnity, and such lamentation as was proper for one whose labours the church lost, though she gained by his example. The place ^uwhere he suffered is said to have a stately church built upon it by Eudocia the empress, wife to Theodosius.

COMMENT *on the portion of Scripture for the Epistle.*

From celebrating the glories of God clothing himself with a body of flesh, we pass to the respects due to the leader of that noble army who willingly unclothed themselves, and put off this body for the testimony of Jesus. Yesterday shewed us the heavens opened, for angels to sing forth the praises of the Son of God descending from thence; to-day the same heavens open, to discover the Son of man *standing at the right hand of God*, and stepping forward, as it were, to take up thither a spirit, not only commended to him, but offering its mortal attendant to sacrifice, the first sacrifice for his truth. In the circumstances of which heroic action described by St. Luke as you have heard, it is easy to observe a great variety of matter, all conducing very much to the honour of that saint we now remember, and to the edification of every pious Christian, who shall set himself seriously to consider and remember him as he ought.

As first, we have here the great mercy and goodness of God, in vouchsafing to St. Stephen such extraordinary measures of his grace, such a comfortable and ravishing prospect of the glories of heaven, to sustain and fortify him in the conflicts of his approaching death, for the sake of his blessed Son. And this is contained in the 55th and 56th verses.

Secondly, we have likewise the steadfastness and vigour of St. Stephen's faith ^xin committing his soul to Jesus at his last minutes. An action, which does evidently imply a firm belief, (1.) that his soul was a substance distinct from his body; (2.) that it should not die with, but continue to exist when separated from, the body; (3.) that the same Jesus, whom he had acknowledged to be very man, is likewise very God, one able to hear and grant this prayer, and to preserve the souls commended to his protection and care; and (4.) that the spirits received by him are in a state of safety and happiness.

Thirdly, here is an admirable pattern of meekness and charity; of tender compassion for them who have none for us; and of forgiving our bitterest and most bloody enemies; even then, when, if ever, our angry resentments might seem allowable. For all this is the

^q Usser. Ann. Vet. et Nov. Test. ad ann. Christ. 34. Pearson Annal. Paulin. p. 1.

^r Le Sueur. ad ann. 38.

^s Evod. apud Niceph. l. 2. c. 3.

^t Hist. Eccl. l. 2. c. 1.

^u Evagr. Hist. Eccl. l. 1. c. 22.

^x Ver. 59.

^y Ver. 60.

result of St. Stephen's praying, that the guilt of his death might not be charged to the men who most wrongfully inflicted it: doing this at the very instant of their executing their malice, and adding to his agonies; and persevering in this invincible charity to his last breath, as if God's mercy to these hardened wretches were the thing, which, of all others, he was most concerned to implore with the dying accents of a tongue to speak no more. Thus not only imitating that blessed Lord, for whom he was content to be so barbarously murdered, but by his example confirming the truth of St. Paul's assertion, that *though a man have all faith, so that he could remove mountains, and though he give his body to be burned, and have not charity, it profiteth him nothing.*

It is not necessary to add more reflections, though more there be, which this portion of Scripture might suggest to us. Nor shall I enlarge upon the two last of these, but reserve those considerations to another place, *where we shall have occasion to observe the same actions in a greater than St. Stephen.* So that my discourse at present shall confine itself to the first head;

The great mercy, I mean, and goodness of God, in vouchsafing to this martyr in his last conflicts such extraordinary measures of his graco, and so comfortable a prospect of the glories of heaven. *Stephen, full of the Holy Ghost, &c.*

And here I shall apply myself to consider two things:

First, the nature and the seasonableness of the supports said here to be afforded St. Stephen upon this occasion.

Secondly, what conclusions we may be allowed to make from this example, for our own comfort and encouragement, under any sufferings and dangers, which the providence of God shall think fit to engage us in; more particularly upon the approach of death.

I. Let us observe, in the first place, the nature and the seasonableness of the supports afforded St. Stephen upon this occasion. And of these we find two expressly mentioned;—the fulness of the Holy Ghost then upon his mind; and the view of God's glory, and Jesus standing at his right hand in heaven.

(1.) First, particular notice is taken of Stephen being at this time *full of the Holy Ghost.* The character given of him, when first mentioned in this history, is, that he was a man *full of faith and of the Holy Ghost.* Which what it means is easy to learn from another passage quickly after, where we read, that *Stephen, full of faith and power, did great wonders and miracles among the people.* These texts compared together shew, that the Holy Ghost there spoken of, denotes those extraordinary gifts of the Spirit, which enabled this holy man to awaken and convince unbelievers by those wonderful operations which confirmed the truth of his doctrine. *And this our Lord hath taught us was a privilege not always confined to persons of sincerity and eminent piety.* But by *the Holy Ghost* in the passage now before us I take another sort of gifts to be meant. Such virtues and

* 1 Cor. xiii. 2, 3.

* Gospel for Thursday before Easter.

^b Ver. 55, 56.

c Acts vi. 5.

d Ver. 8.

e Mat. vii. 22.

graces as were proper for, and shined forth with so bright a lustre in, St. Stephen's present circumstances. Such unseen, and yet such mighty peace and inward joy, as, with regard to the persecutions and troubles of his suffering servants, might move our Lord most fitly to promise this Spirit in the style and title of a *Comforter*. Such eager zeal and undaunted courage to do and suffer all things for Christ and his truth, as should baffle all those weaknesses or inclinations of nature, which dispose us to be too tenderly affected with the ease and comforts of the life we now lead. Such heavenly-mindedness, as fixes all our hopes, and directs all our aims, so as to centre in the rewards reserved for a future state, and makes every affliction look light and little in our eyes; so far from being to be dreaded or declined, as rather to be embraced and chosen, delighted and triumphed in, upon the account of that *eternal weight of glory, which this worketh out for us*. Such love of God, as esteems it a blessedness to be sacrificed for his honour. Such love of our brethren, as grudges no pain or expence that may contribute to the salvation of their souls. Such love of our enemies, as returns good-will for hatred, prayers for persecutions, meekness for malice; and is in all points conformable to him, *who, when he was reviled, reviled not again, when he suffered threatened not, but committed his soul to him that judgeth righteously, and hath herein left us an example that we should follow his steps*. These dispositions make up a frame and temper of mind, so different from the tendencies of human nature, as the case now stands with it; so far superior to any thing that the principles of mere reason could suggest; that, wheresoever we see them, we may be confident they came down from above, and are entirely owing to a power and wisdom that assists and directs, raises and refines, influences and overrules our natural powers. Experience and observation both assure us, that very liberal measures of these supernatural helps are necessary to produce such shining perfections. And therefore, though the communication of these helps had been large, and the force of them very conspicuous in the other parts of St. Stephen's conduct; yet they seem to have been much more plentifully shed upon him in this last act of his life. So plentifully, that, as if the frailties of a mortal were quite absorbed, and he had no motions left in his soul but such as were thus inspired, he is for that reason very significantly said to be *full of the Holy Ghost*.

Nor was the goodness of God more remarkable in the degree of these assistances, than in the time made choice of for imparting them. For what circumstances is it possible to form to our own imagination that could stand more in need of them, than those in which St. Stephen was at present? He had been exercised with perpetual opposition ever since (we are sure, and probably before) his election into the ministry of the church; attacked by men of principles that are generally implacable, for such are blind zeal and worldly interest: each of them hard, when single, but both in conjunction almost

impossible to be brought to reason. ^b His enemies, enraged with the discredit of being defeated by him in their public disputations; wretches of a conscience so profligate, that, to retrieve their own repute, and rid their hands of so troublesome, because so powerful an adversary, they had suborned false witnesses; and brought him before the council and high priest, only to put the better face on their bloody design, and that they might murder in form of law. His vindication from their calumnies had been so far from softening, that it did but the more exasperate; insomuch, that being now lost to all temper and all decency, they, instead of replying, *gnashed upon him with their teeth*. A gesture that speaks the extremity of anger and fury ungovernable, of unrelenting cruelty and envy and spite.

It was easy to discern whither all this rancour would grow; and necessary that the direct effects of it should be borne with a magnanimity and meekness, that might adorn and demonstrate the power of that doctrine for which St. Stephen suffered. And, since the person called to suffer for it was of the same infirmities and passions, the same natural aversions to pain and death, with common men, God was graciously pleased to conquer these reluctancies and strengthen those weaknesses, by a grace, that rose in proportion to those overflowings of ungodliness, whose impetuous torrent was to be stemmed by it. Again, since every act of Christian obedience is supposed and required to proceed upon rational principles; since that of dying for religion, the last and highest instance of it, ought to do so too, at least as much as any, thereby to distinguish itself from humour and hardness and folly; and, since it could not be rational for a man voluntarily to divest himself of a good in possession, except by way of exchange for some greater good in reversion; it follows, that nothing can so much contribute to a man's suffering cheercfully for a good cause, as the assured expectation of a reward upon that account, which will abundantly compensate all that he can possibly endure. But now, because things engage our affections and move our desires, not in proportion to what they are in their own nature, but according to the apprehensions we have of them; upon this champion's entering the lists with malice and violence and death, it pleased God to grant him a

2. Second support, contained in these words, which relate of St. Stephen that *he looked up steadfastly into heaven, and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing on the right hand of God*. Whether this opening of the heavens were real, and such as is generally believed to have been at our Lord's baptism in Jordan; or whether this, like several appearances to the prophets of the Old Testament, were represented to St. Stephen by way of vision, as we cannot certainly know, so is it of no great consequence that we should. For, in regard a vision is described by them who are particularly curious in these matters, to be such a distinct and strong impression upon the faculty of imagination, as sets the object before the man as plainly as if it actu-

^b Chap. vi. 10.ⁱ Matth. iii; Luke iii; John i.^j Maim. Mor. Ner. p. ii. c. 36.

ally were present, and perceived by his bodily senses; it is out of question that either of these ways comes all to one, as to the certainty of persuasion, and every other effect which we can suppose it intended to produce in the mind of the party acted upon by it. And therefore, besides the operations of the Holy Ghost already mentioned, I make no doubt but one was to assure St. Stephen that he was under no delusion in this case, but influenced and enlightened by God, who thus opened his eyes by an extraordinary grace. And, as in other instances the heavens are described to open, and the Spirit said to enter into men, and they to be in the Spirit, and the like^k; so he is here said to be full of the Holy Ghost, and to see the heavens opened when these discoveries were made; and that in a manner lively and clear, which no natural powers of the brightest and most penetrating mind could ever have attained to.

Such were the discoveries in the case now under consideration; the majesty of God surrounded with light, to which no mortal can approach, attended with a numerous retinue of angels; the person of Jesus, invested with power and dominion; and that human nature, which had of late been so ignominiously treated, that body which expired upon a cross, now placed in honour at the right hand of his Father, and giving law to all those heavenly powers, than whom he had a little while submitted to be lower; and such other prospects of those blissful regions, as gave this martyr a clear sight and sweet foretaste of the joys and glories reserved for all them who shall be ever with their dearest Lord. These I conceive to be the objects and ingredients that made up St. Stephen's vision. The nature whereof being thus explained, it remains only that I observe the seasonableness of this mercy to him, to finish my first head of discourse.

To this purpose let us consider of what use this was, or might have been, for the conviction of others, and of what it certainly was to St. Stephen himself.

1. It certainly was or might have been of great use for the conviction of others. And for that reason, no doubt, St. Stephen immediately declared it to the assembly. Which, consisting principally of persons learned in the law and history, and altogether, as is most probable, of men making profession of the Jewish religion, ought to have been restrained from their intended mischief, and turned their thoughts to another sort of considerations. They were not ignorant that such glorious appearances of the Divine Majesty had been frequent under the Old Testament; and that such marks of God's especial presence were marks of kindness and distinction; that he did not use to be so particular in the manifestations of himself, except to those who were as particularly acceptable to him, and very highly in his favour. So that to persons educated in and possessed of these notions, it is not easy to conceive what more authentic testimony could be given of St. Stephen's innocence, or the truth of all he preached, and of his conduct and his cause being approved and espoused above.

^k Ezek. i. 1; ii. 2; iii. 14; xl. 24; Rev. i. 10.

But that which ought yet more effectually to have proved all this to them was the other part of St. Stephen's vision, wherein Jesus was represented *standing at the right hand of God*. Such an exaltation of him whom they had so lately persecuted in his own person, and now continued to persecute in his members, declaring most evidently the Divine love and favour, not only to that Saviour who had suffered such indignities while himself was upon earth, but to all those who should afterwards suffer for his sake, and after his example, to whose righteousness the Father had given the unparalleled attestation of seating his human nature upon his own throne in heaven. And yet this very circumstance did, above all the rest, inflame the malice and sharpen the envy of the Jews. So blind were they to all those evidences for the truth, which if admitted must have produced a self-condemnation for all their prejudices and former wicked practices; so hard it is to bring habitual sinners to forsake and retract the errors and vices to which they have been used to abandon themselves; so far are those means of conversion, which in their own nature are fit and sufficient, from proving efficacious and successful in the event; so miserable the wretched men whom God, in the justice of his judgments, delivers over to a reprobate sense, by drawing down upon their own heads the prophet's curse in its most fatal meaning; making the *things which should have been for their wealth an occasion of falling* deeper and more desperately. For what else did these enraged zealots, when, instead of being awed, or in any degree restrained by the manifestation of this glory, they made his publishing the mighty favour a fresh and more unpardonable provocation to murder him? What did they but extract poison out of the richest antidotes, and render the most sovereign remedies the most incurable aggravation of their disease?

2. In the meanwhile the wonderful effects of this mercy are no less conspicuous upon a mind rightly prepared to improve by it. For who can express the comfort, the joy, that St. Stephen must needs have conceived upon such a glorious scene opening before his eyes? When death, in its most terrible form, drew up to him, and rage and violence were swallowing him up; what could so powerfully support human nature under the fears and weaknesses which in such critical junctures it is least able to get above? What loosen all those bands which are apt to fasten us down to things present and agreeable to the appetites we now carry about, and are perpetually acted upon by, like a sensible demonstration of the infinitely more desirable state, awaiting every disciple of that Master who dares to trust and so far take his word, as to choose the losing his life for the true method of saving it? What vigour and strength must it inspire into this noble champion for the truth, what firmness to his former resolutions, to observe the Judge of the combat looking on? nay, not only keeping his eye upon every conflict, but stepping forward, as it were, to his assistance, and holding forth the promised crown of life and glory, ready

to be put on as soon as the toil of the bloody field should be over, and his servant's faithfulness unto the end had won the inestimable prize? What fulness of assurance must that hope be raised to which saw *the man Christ Jesus* glorified? saw him, not only as the judge and rewarder, but as the example and the pledge of sufferings rewarded; and, in his glory, consequently foresee its own? What sting could that death have left, which led to such a life? What resentment could that malice provoke, which, the more fierce and implacable it was, the more it made the party pursued by it to resemble that great pattern; and whom it planted together into the likeness of his dying, was sure to advance to a proportionable likeness of his rising and reigning in heaven? Well enough may the men who make sense their principle, and the world their god, look on the achievements of martyred saints as the effects of blind enthusiasm and ungoverned zeal; well enough they, who feel no motions, taste no comforts, but such as nature furnishes; and know no spring but passion, no law but reason, detract from the praises due to their gallantry and greatness of soul, impute their meekness, their constancy, their charity, to weakness or phlegm, and natural stupidity; or else represent them as impracticable, and therefore hardly credible: but where it pleases God to shed forth his grace, and pour forth his consolations with a liberal hand, there men find themselves able to do and suffer much more, and in quite another manner than they supposed it possible; and than it was indeed possible to have come up to, without such plentiful accessions of strength from above. And therefore, even the conquests gained by the martyr of this day deserve our praise and wonder; though very much upon the account of those sufferings and virtues which have immortalized his honour, yet most of all upon the account of that extraordinary grace which even filled him with the Holy Ghost, and that *glory revealed*, with which he rightly reckoned that *the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared*. O happy sufferings! which qualified the endurer to have part of his heaven upon earth! O death truly triumphant! which put him into actual possession of joys, whose prospect alone made so entire a conquest over infirmities and temptations, agonies and terrors! but above all, O goodness and mercy, tender beyond expression! which so kindly considered the greatness of those infirmities common to all mankind, the force of those temptations and terrors common to dying men, and more especially strong upon them who die by violence and wrong; as to send supports, as extraordinary as the occasion. Supports, contrived to animate, not him only to whom they were then vouchsafed, but full of hope and consolation to others, to all the faithful. For, though the favour we are treating of were particular, yet the influences of it are large and general. And while we recollect St. Stephen's privileges, we do but half our business, if they be not so considered as to help us in a right understanding of our own. To which purpose it is that I promised to observe, in the

II. Second place, what conclusions are allowable to be drawn from this instance before us for the comfort and encouragement of every good Christian, under any sufferings and dangers which the providence of God shall at any time think fit to engage such in; more particularly upon the approach of death.

An inquiry this of so much greater importance, because, of all the advantages in this world which recommend the Christian religion, none are more valuable than those comforts we are encouraged to hope for from it in such distressed circumstances as need it most: when human and temporal succours have forsaken us, and leave no other dependence for the soul to rest itself upon but the sense of a gracious God, and a good conscience at present, and the prospect of a glorious reward for our sufferings hereafter.

Now, of these assistances and supports in general, there are many texts of Scripture which sufficiently assure us. Such as those wherein God declares that *his grace is sufficient for his afflicted servants*; that *his strength is made perfect in their weakness*; that *he will not suffer such to be tempted above their ability, but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that they may be able to bear it*; that *he will never leave them nor forsake them*. So that we may boldly say, *The Lord is my helper, and I will not fear what man shall do unto me*. Such passages, and sundry others of like import, are every good man's security, that no necessary grace or consolation shall be wanting to him: and the many extraordinary instances of these supplies, so abundantly imparted to the saints heretofore, are so many pledges and fresh confirmations of the truth of God in promises of this nature. But in what manner, what measures, what seasons, those consolations shall be afforded to each of us, those examples are no farther a rule to judge by than the case of those saints and ours are alike. And therefore, when we argue from this topic, if we would avoid mistakes, and not flatter ourselves with groundless expectations, or charge God foolishly for not allowing us privileges that belong not to us; it must be our great care to distinguish aright with regard to three things:

1. The exigencies of the cases compared.
2. The qualifications of the parties concerned.
3. The nature of the blessings and supports themselves.

1. As to the exigencies of the cases compared; St. Stephen's hath a great many particularities in it, which forbid us to make it a rule for the sufferings and death of good Christians in common. He was a martyr for the Gospel, and it is very reasonable to suppose that God in his goodness will not fail to give demonstrations of his love suitable to the degree of theirs for him, who give the last proof of their sincerity and zeal, by sacrificing their lives to his service. We cannot think it strange that he should make clear evidence, how kindly he accepts so costly an oblation; and not only enable such men to offer it cheerfully, but shew them, by a view more than usually distinct, what they shall receive in exchange in another world, who have ac-

counted nothing dear to them in this, so they may win and bring honour to their Lord.

But if the shining virtues and flaming piety of martyrs in general seem so justly to recommend them to particular and distinguishing marks of the divine favour in their conflicts, there is a great deal more to be said why St. Stephen should be yet more eminently distinguished. He was set in the forefront of the battle, the first of that noble army who resisted unto blood in defence of Jesus and his truth. And it was of mighty consequence what issue that encounter met with. Of mighty consequence, not only to the champion himself, but to the cause in which he was engaged, and to many millions of souls who were to engage in it after him. The religion, which undertook so boldly to renounce the world, and *brought life and immortality to light*, was then in its infancy. And an instance of those regions of immortality opening themselves to one who had so steadfastly fixed his eyes upon them, and, in the strength of that vision, triumphed over death and malice in their ghastliest form, proves the force as well as the certainty of those hopes and that faith inspired by the Gospel. His adversaries, who had recourse to the same methods of subornation and pretended blasphemy, and violence and tumult, in taking off this diligent servant, as they had lately exercised upon his Master, deserved to meet with the mortification of finding their envy defeated, and their hypocritical zeal publicly disallowed, by the God they professed to serve by it. But especially they that already did, and they that were about to embrace this religion, which, in a time of general persecution, could not but cost them very dear, needed the benefit of such an example to animate and fix their good beginnings. It was fit to shew these men how ready heaven was to receive them, what mansions were prepared there, how true that promise is, that where their Lord is they shall be also; and in the meanwhile that he, who had vanquished death by enduring it, was always able, always at hand, to empower those who tread in his steps to vanquish it the same way. And thus we may see that St. Stephen's case is far from being a measure for Christians in general to promise themselves the same supports he found: for, as a martyr, it was reasonable he should be sustained with higher degrees of grace than they who undergo common dangers, or die a natural death; because it is one thing to die in one's duty, and another to die voluntarily *for* it. And, as the first martyr, it was fit he should be a pattern and encouragement to the rest who were to follow. A pattern by the perfection of his virtues, an encouragement by the revelation of his glorious reward.

But, though we cannot assure ourselves of these spiritual comforts in the like manner and proportion where our circumstances are not alike; yet, so far as the comparison holds, we are warranted, from such instances as this, to rely upon and be very confident of suitable assistances and supports. For God is always the same, and his goodness and wisdom never fail to consider the infirmities of human nature, and that *flesh* which is *weak* even when the *spirit* is *most willing*. He will ever be very tenderly concerned for the advancement of

his own honour, and the religion he hath enjoined and espoused. And therefore, of what kind soever our trials be, or from what cause soever they proceed, due regard will certainly be had of them. And this ought to content us; since we are in the hands of one, who is a better judge of our necessities than ourselves can possibly be; one always determined rather to give overmeasure, than to withhold any part of what we really lack; one, not confined to any particular method, but furnished with infinite variety of means, for conveying the riches of his grace to us; one, that knows how to make a lively vigorous faith and holy hope supply the place and serve the purposes of vision and immediate revelation; one, who can let heaven into the soul of Christians thus disposed, as well as set the beauties of it before the eyes of St. Stephen. But thou they must be persons disposed as St. Stephen was; for that, I said, was a second distinction necessary for directing our judgment and justifying our expectations in matters of this nature.

2. The qualifications of the parties concerned. Though there be nothing in the very best of us that can deserve, either that grace of God which enables us to do or suffer according to his good will, or that light of his countenance lifted up upon us, when we do so; yet no truth is more express than that these gifts, free as they are, will not be dealt to all promiscuously; but require and presuppose a temper of mind fit for and so far worthy of them, as to be within the conditions they are promised upon. In St. Stephen accordingly, we cannot but observe a bright constellation of the noblest virtues, a constancy immovable, a zeal most ardent, a resignation unreserved, a faith and meekness and charity invincible. And can we wonder that the blessed Jesus made such condescending approaches to one who drew so near, came up so high toward him, not only in the wrongfulness and manner of his death, but in the exercise of all those graces which adorned it, which rendered it so exemplary, so fruitful in proselytes, so victorious over enemies and gainsayers! The history of the Christian church furnishes many instances of persons, who, in the times of persecution, laid down their lives, and underwent tortures inexpressible, with a cheerfulness and magnanimity far surpassing the powers of human nature; persons, the tenderness of whose sex, or the circumstances of whose condition, were by no means a match for the sufferings they have been called to. And who yet, by their astonishing cheerfulness and undaunted courage, have gained over more to the belief of the truth they died for, at their last hour, than their most artful reasonings and most moving eloquence had been able to convince during the whole course of their lives. And sundry others have in every age met and encountered and conquered death (which even when most natural is a sore conflict) with a composure of mind that excites the admiration, and almost the envy of the beholders. But if the cases in either of these kinds be now more raro than might in reason be expected, it is not because the arm of our almighty Helper is shortened, or that the force of religion and its principles is abated in itself; but from the degeneracy of those who check the

influence these might have upon them. It is indeed because they who never felt the power of Christianity while they lived, in vain expect the supports of it when they come to die. When men under insults and injuries seek to relieve themselves by contention and revenge, they take the matter out of God's hand, and discharge that protection which his honour engages him to extend to those who *flee from wrath, and let go displeasure, and commit their cause and persons entirely to their righteous Judge and most merciful Creator.* When distresses and dangers put us upon unlawful means of escape, or tempt us to trust to an arm of flesh in the use of such means as are most lawful; we have no longer right to look that he, whom we shut out (so far as in us lies) from any part in our affairs, will appear and interpose so visibly in our favour, as he hath often done, and is always ready to do, for them who flee straight to him for succour, and make his providence their only rock and refuge, and disclaim all other confidences as impious or vain. When our last dreadful enemy marches up, and makes his attack in all the pomp of terror, *when our flesh and our heart faileth,* can we suppose that God will declare himself their portion in another life, who never esteemed or desired in this life any portion, but the pleasures or greatness or riches of the world, which are now forsaking them? No certainly. Nothing but a resemblance of St. Stephen's virtues can entitle us to St. Stephen's consolations. A mind unlike his is not worthy, is not capable of them. To triumph over the malice of our enemies, we must bring ourselves to forgive the worst they can do to us. And that, not only when the passions are cool, or time hath laid our resentments to sleep, but at the very instant of our being highest provoked, and smarting most sensibly under the wicked effects of their spite. To enjoy the reviving prospects of a glorious eternity, it is necessary we should, with him, *look up steadfastly to heaven*; that our affections and hopes, our whole heart, our whole treasure should be there. And to *sleep* as he did, when this long night shall close our eyes, we must, as he *did,* *commit our spirits into the hands of the Lord Jesus*; be perfectly content to leave the world at any time, in any manner he sees fittest for us; devote ourselves entirely to his service, and be solicitous for nothing but that, *whether we live we may live unto the Lord, or whether we die we may die unto the Lord.* To this frame of mind if we in good earnest aspire, we shall soon find those excellencies in religion attainable, which while at a distance from we find some difficulty to admit as credible. And we shall then also taste those sweet satisfactions, which are *pearls not to be cast before swine, and too holy to be given to the dogs.* But, till this be endeavoured with all our might, for whatever we fall short in the assistances or the comforts of grace, the loss and the blame is all due to our own unfaithfulness and sloth.

3. The third and last distinction to be made upon this occasion concerns the nature of these blessings and supports themselves. A distinction no less necessary than either of the former. Because they are manifestly of two sorts, some of them helps toward the discharge of our duty; others of them, satisfactions that sweeten it to us. The

end of the former is to preserve us in safety, that of the latter is to keep us at ease. The one we cannot be without, because they are assistances; and therefore these, which come within the notion of necessary grace, are within the covenant; such as God leaves no man destitute of, if the fault be not in the person that wants them. The other are properly comforts, and come within the notion of rewards: and, since the rewards of our obedience are strictly in the happiness of a future state, these are, what we are rather to wish, and pray for, and rejoice in, than absolutely to depend upon. God is very gracious and bountiful in affording them, because they are overmeasure; but he is not unjust in withholding them, because they are uncovenanted mercies. These are indeed usual, but by no means inseparable attendants upon doing well; but those not only follow, but go before us in well-doing; for till we have them, we can do no manner of thing that is good. When St. Paul prays that God would fill the *Romans with joy and peace in believing*, he supposes their faith to be sincere before the obtaining of that joy and peace. And many passages assure us, that the comforts of a good life, and what we find called *the light of God's countenance*, are frequently withheld from excellent persons, and may be so for their great advantage. This may be done as a farther trial of their patience and perseverance, their unchangeable love of God, and the firmness of their trust in a recompense hereafter, the larger in reserve by how much less they have down in hand here. And therefore, in all our dangers and distresses, we ought to think ourselves well dealt with, if we have enough from above to encounter, though not to soften our difficulties; to preserve and secure our virtue, though not to fulfil our joy. And even in our last agonies, though God do not let in heaven upon us, and raise our souls up to St. Stephen's pitch; it is very well if he sustain our hearts, rescue us from the enemy, who then especially besets us; and grant that wise and modest prayer of our church, in not *suffering us at our last hour for any pains of death to fall from him*. In short, helps are for a state of combat, but joys are for a state of victory and triumph. And therefore, till the field be won, it ought to content us that we are encouraged to *come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need*; and exhorted, *not to be weary in well-doing*, with this promise, that though we do not yet, yet *in due season we shall reap, provided we faint not*.

I have chosen the rather to be large upon this point, not only because the case of St. Stephen seemed to minister a proper occasion for it, but in hopes of correcting an error very common in the world, of laying too great a stress upon the temper of mind in which men appear to depart this life. It is indeed a comfortable and very desirable thing, when a good man obeys this last call with all the signs of contentedness and tranquillity of spirit; but this is not a circumstance of such weight, as upon it alone to form any reasonable judgment of our brethren's state in the world to which they are gone.

Such a death, it is true, is very agreeable to the condition of sincere penitents and devout Christians. It is, what the reflections upon a life well spent, and the sense of a God reconciled through the merits and sufferings of a crucified Redeemer, are above all things capable of producing. On the other hand, nothing arms death with so sharp and painful a sting, as the bitter remembrances of sin unpardoned, the loud reproaches of a guilty conscience, and the dismal apprehensions of a provoked Judge. But then it is to be considered withal, how strongly the mind and body work upon each other, and what a speedy communication of infirmities passes between them. The different degrees of natural courage, the several constitutions of our bodies, the uncertain motions of the animal spirits, and the ebblings and flowings of a distemper, these and a hundred more causes there are, either natural or casual, in which religion hath no part at all. And these, upon a bed of languishing, may create such different impressions, as shall sometimes occasion agonies and fears in exceeding good men, and a seeming quiet and security in very bad men. If then we would be safe ourselves, and think rightly of others, let us govern our opinion and our behaviour by this rule, which will never deceive us; that the way to die the death of the righteous, is to live the life of the righteous; and, if we desire our latter end should be like his, it must be our care that our beginning and our whole proceeding be like his too. For, though the consequence be not great, what mistakes we are guilty of in regard of them who go before us, and who are not one whit more or less happy for the judgments we make of them; yet they are of mighty consequence in regard of ourselves, who are too apt to be content with that which we fondly imagine to be sufficient for others. But be assured, that when we come to die, the exercise of one proper Christian grace will stand us in more stead than a great many of those imaginary satisfactions with which ourselves or others may happen to be then transported. And, therefore, if we hope in earnest to attain St. Stephen's happiness, we should rather make his virtues than his vision our pattern. And, provided we have but the former, the matter is not great if God do not allow us the latter. Let us therefore make the right improvement of having this eminent saint in remembrance, and endeavour, as well as pray, that our minds may be brought to his holy frame. So that, in all our afflictions, but especially any in which it shall please God to call us to for *the testimony of his truth, we may steadfastly look up to heaven, and by faith behold the glory which shall be revealed; and, being filled with the Holy Ghost, whose necessary graces are never wanting to any who diligently seek and use them, may attain to that eminent instance of charity, to love and bless our persecutors.* Thus shall we find the help and favour of him *who standeth at the right hand of God, to succour all them that suffer for,* and who, if not appointed to suffer for him, yet do their utmost to live and die in his true faith and fear, *the blessed Jesus, our only Mediator and Advocate.*

THE GOSPEL. St. Matth. xxiii. 34^u.

34 *Behold, I send unto you prophets, and wise men, and scribes: and some of them ye shall kill and crucify; and some of them shall ye scourge in your synagogues, and persecute them from city to city:*

of all sorts, which the persons inspired by God, preachers and expounders of the Christian law, shall receive at your merciless hands.

35 *That upon you may come all the righteous blood shed upon the earth, from the blood of righteous Abel unto the blood of Zacharias son of Barachias, whom ye slew between the temple and the altar.*

36 *Verily I say unto you, All these things shall come upon this generation.*

bring upon them the vengeance due for those committed by their ancestors. Whose wickedness they have been so far from being reformed by, that they have imitated, repeated, and far exceeded it all.

37 *O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not!*

38 *Behold, your house is left unto you desolate.*

how many offers of conversion and grace, of protection and defence from the calamities now approaching, have I over and over laid before you! But ye have rejected them all. Therefore these happy opportunities are about to be taken away from you, and your deserved destruction is irreversibly decreed.

39 *For I say unto you, Ye shall not see me henceforth, till ye shall say, Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord.*

last but a little longer; and after that, those words of David, which, when applied to me by the acclamations of the multitudes, provoked your indignation, shall then in vain be in your mouths, expecting your Messiah as a deliverer, whom you shall find a just avenger of your crimes against him. Or (as some interpreters) this heavy displeasure of God shall continue upon you and your posterity till you shall be converted, and acknowledge me for the true Messiah (prophesied of by David) at my second coming.

34. A proof of all that hypocrisy and obstinate wickedness, which I have laid to your charge, you will shortly give, in the barbarous treatment of all

35, 36. Which incorrigible malice and obstinacy will provoke God to punish this present age of the Jews, not only for the sins and murders committed by their own persons; but also to

bring upon them the vengeance due for those committed by their ancestors. Whose wickedness they have been so far from being reformed by, that they have imitated, repeated, and far exceeded it all.

37, 38. O wretched people, (of which Jerusalem is the metropolis and common mother,) who thus persist in murdering those who are sent to teach and to reclaim you, how many instances of the tenderest affection,

how many offers of conversion and grace, of protection and defence from the calamities now approaching, have I over and over laid before you! But ye have rejected them all. Therefore these happy opportunities are about to be taken away from you, and your deserved destruction is irreversibly decreed.

39. For, take my word, the time of my present manifestation among you will

last but a little longer; and after that, those words of David, which, when applied to me by the acclamations of the multitudes, provoked your indignation, shall then in vain be in your mouths, expecting your Messiah as a deliverer, whom you shall find a just avenger of your crimes against him. Or (as some interpreters) this heavy displeasure of God shall continue upon you and your posterity till you shall be converted, and acknowledge me for the true Messiah (prophesied of by David) at my second coming.

COMMENT.

We have here a remarkable prediction of two things: (1.) The unparalleled cruelty of the hypocritical and unbelieving Jews upon the preachers of the Christian faith. (2.) The severity of those judgments which were, by that provocation, drawn down upon this inflexible people and their city, polluted with so much innocent blood. The former of these predictions began to be fulfilled in the martyr of this day; the latter was charged upon him as ^xblasphemy against God, the law, the temple, and the holy city, and made a pretence for gratifying their malice by his death.

In treating of this scripture, I will first very briefly explain one or two difficulties for the better understanding of it; and then raise some practical observations, which may help us to improve by it.

1. The first difficulty I shall take notice of is that which learned men have thought so differently about, the person meant in the 35th verse by the name of *Zacharias the son of Barachias*. Concerning whom, they seem to judge very probably who think him that ^y*Zachariah* mentioned to be slain by the command of king Joash. The occasion of his death was the freedom he took in reproving a wicked people; the place agrees with that mentioned here; the sin of it is expressly said to be visited upon the king and the people; vengeance was imprecated by his last dying breath; and the name of *Barachiah*, being of the same sense with that of *Jehoiada*, it is thought, might in common use be put for it, in reverence to that name of *Jehovah*, which the later Jews, esteeming it unlawful to utter, where the letters of that name occurred, are said to have substituted another of like signification in its stead.

There are indeed three circumstances which incline to *Zachariah*, one of the last prophets; one, that he is expressly the ^zson of *Barachiah* in holy writ; a second, that he is in one of the Jewish Targums said to be murdered in the holy place; a third, that, being later in time, and but just before the gift of prophecy ceased, his blood is thought more properly to be set as the opposite term to that of *Abel*; the one as the first that ever was, the other as the last prophet under the law; both put to death by wicked men, merely because they were themselves, and laboured to make others, righteous.

Either of these opinions hath its probable arguments; each far superior to that which applies this passage to *Zachary* the father of *John Baptist*: who does not appear either to have been sent to the Jews under the character of a prophet, or to have been owned by them as such; or to be the son of *Barachias*, or slain as is here mentioned (except by a tradition of no credit at all). So likewise for that other *Zacharias* mentioned by *Josephus*, it hath been thought not so sufficiently made out, either that his father's name was the same, though near it; or that he was a prophet; or that our Lord's words

^x Acts vi. 11, 13, 14.^y See 2 Chron. xxiv. 20-26.^z Zech. i. 1.

can without some violence be referred to an action done after the time of speaking them.

Meanwhile, though somewhat might be expected on so celebrated a question, I content myself with saying the less, because the knowledge of this particular person signifies little to us; the general sense in the paraphrase sufficiently declaring our Lord's intention, and serving all the uses this text is capable of.

2. Another thing I conceive to be necessary upon this occasion, which is, to set before you the just extent of that kind offer made by our Lord, to *gather* these Jews, as a *hen gathereth her chickens under her wings*: an expression that hath been thought conveniently enough interpreted in either of the two following senses:

1. This manner of speech plainly signifies protection from dangers; for thus David describes the good man's safety, by saying he shall *be covered under God's wings, and rest secure under his feathers*. A manifest allusion to fowls sheltering their young upon the approach of birds of prey. And then by this people's *house being left unto them desolate*, we are to understand the withdrawing that protection, which when deprived of they would stand naked and alone; as liable to destruction as little chickens are to be devoured by every ravenous creature when the dam is not at hand to succour and spread herself over them.

2. But some place a peculiar elegance in this expression with regard to the ancient sanctuary, in which the cherubs shadowed the mercy seat with their wings. And because this was an emblem of God's especial presence, (a presence nowhere else so visibly exhibited,) therefore the admission of proselytes into covenant with the true God was called by the Jews a receiving or *gathering* of such under the wings of the Divine Majesty. And thus our Lord's willingness to *gather Jerusalem's children* under his wings will mean all the kind endeavours to convince and instruct them in the Gospel-covenant, and to make them partakers of those privileges and that salvation which they with so blind and unpersuadable an obstinacy held out against.

I see not, I confess, any necessity for strictly confining the words to either of these senses in bar to the other. For since it is usual in every language, by one eminent instance to intend all the effects of any passion, this expression may very well be extended to every mark of tenderness and natural affection so visible in the creatures alluded to toward their young; and in proportion, to all the testimonies of our Lord's paternal kindness and care, whether relating to their spiritual or their temporal preservation. If so, the punishment threatened to the refusers of such kindness will include, not only a withdrawing his defence from their city and nation, but a depriving them of those means of grace which had been so long and so liberally, but withal, by reason of their own perverseness, so unsuccessfully afforded, repeated, continued to them, before those dreadful judgments were suffered to

take place. The Romans could not demolish their house till that invisible but mighty force within the walls was drawn off. The Devil could not absolutely captivate their minds so long as the word and spirit of truth strove against him. But when they refused to join in their own defence, the grace of God would depart and give them over to that blindness in which they remain to this day. And when their hypocrisy and barbarity had made God their enemy too, the power of man would then find it as easy to seize and ravage, burn and destroy, as it is to lay a dwelling in ruins which is left perfectly empty, and forsaken of those owners or inhabitants whose concern it was formerly to support and defend it.

Thus much may suffice for the explanation of this passage. I now proceed to make improvement of it by some practical observations proper to be raised from hence.

I. As first, from the case of the Jews, we may easily discern how very heinous and provoking in the sight of God the sin of persecution is. To stand it out against all the power of persuasion, and not entertain the truth, when proposed with the evidence brought by our Lord and his apostles to confirm it, was a perverseness like that of a brood refusing to be gathered under the wings of the hen. But to do despite to and count such persons *our enemies* because they tell us the truth; to torment and murder those whose only aim is to reform and shew us our errors, and so prevent our eternal undoing; this is just such unnatural cruelty as it would be if the brood should fly upon their dam, and tear her in pieces, when she kindly offers them protection, and spreads those wings abroad to receive them, under which alone they can be safe. This is such a prodigy of ingratitude, as no creature but mankind, as none but the worst and most unreasonable among men, were ever guilty of. And accordingly we find that, after the several black enormities and gross impostures by which the honour of God and religion is said in this chapter to suffer so greatly, the indelible reproach of Jerusalem, the last unpardonable aggravation of her sins, is charged upon her being *a killer of the prophets*, and *a stoner of them that were sent to reclaim her*.

It is thus that they are said to *fill up the measure of their fathers*. It is hence that our Saviour calls them *serpents and vipers*, and asks how they can *escape the damnation of hell*. And the reason of their proceeding in this manner was their hypocrisy; using religion as a matter of convenience, and putting on the form of it for a disguise to cover their ambition or their covetousness, their pride or their sensuality, which made them loath to have their eyes opened to the prejudice of their interests or their lusts. And if their teachers would be troublesome, be it at their peril; for, when other means failed, they knew one effectual way to be quiet and put them to silence, by making the loss of their lives pay for the forwardness of so bold a zeal.

But we will put the most favourable state of the case, and admit, that persecution is not always from a sensual or worldly design, but

sometimes from a good meaning; which really supposes the preachers of truth to be ill men and deceivers, and the honour of God and their own duty to be highly concerned for suppressing and rooting them out. For thus our Lord forewarns his disciples, that *“whosoever killed them would think he did God service;”* and St. Paul testifies, not only of himself, that he *“verily thought he ought to do many things against the name of Jesus of Nazareth,”* but likewise of many of the Jews, *“that they had a zeal for God, though not according to knowledge.”* Yet still persecution is a great and crying sin, even in those who think themselves bound to persecute. The not knowing better did not excuse these Jews from that heavy load of calamities denounced against them here. And St. Paul styles what he did in that persuasion the effect of *“exceeding madness,”* and himself *“a blasphemer, injurious person, and chief of sinners, because he persecuted the church of God,”* though at the same time he declares *“he did it ignorantly and in unbelief.”*

Now the reason of this is plain and uncontestable: for a man's opinion of things does not alter the nature of the things themselves. Moral good and evil are fixed in their own condition and essence, and in the determination of the Divine will. If my conscience then put me upon that which is evil, it is not my mistaking it for good that can make it cease to be evil, either in itself or to me. Every man's conscience, it is true, is the candle of the Lord within him: but it lies upon every man to take good heed at what fire that candle is lighted. That the directions issuing from it be pure, and taken from the word of God, and not from the prejudices of his own mind, and the heat of a sanguine or enthusiastic imagination. For the want of this care is the very reason that so many people are misled, and run even into the horriblest extravagancies upon pretence of conscience and religion. They bring their interests, or their pleasures, or some other prepossessions along with them, and then they accommodate matters so as to make the laws of God stoop and bend to their own humours. Those are, to them, like first self-evident principles; and all things else appear true or false, in proportion as they agree or disagree with those. This therefore is the condemnation, that they who mean right do not take due care to understand and judge right. A thing impossible to be done, when things are not considered fairly, all heats or animosities, inclinations or interests, resentments and respect of persons apart.

Now the letting ourselves be misguided in such a case as persecution cannot escape great blame. Because, however men may happen to think differently in matters of less moment, or about dark and doubtful controversies; yet it is so exceeding evident, that treachery and malice, tortures and bloodshed, are methods so vile and black, so very dishonourable, so very unfit for winning ever men of a contrary judgment, whose contrary judgment is all their offence, (for otherwise it is not properly persecution,) that one must have quenched a great deal even of his natural light, and have read the Scriptures with a very strange bias upon his mind, who can turn his thoughts to the

d John xvi. 2.

e Acts xxvi. 9.

f Rom. x. 2.

g Acts xvi. 2; 1 Tim. i. 13, 15.

practice and justification of such proceedings upon any the most plausible pretence whatsoever. In short, zeal is like all other passions; when rightly placed and duly moderated, of admirable use and benefit; but if blind, so as to mistake its object, or excessive, so as to degenerate into fury, it is like a madman in the dark, that lays about him without fear or wit.

That then which must bear a man out in acting according to his conscience is the right judgment which his conscience makes. Every boasted light is not rashly to be followed, for (God knows) there are, in religion too, many *ignes fatui*, that lead men into bogs and precipices and ruin. But a true light that cannot be which carries men quite away from the first and brightest principles of charity and justice, and even common humanity. Such is the sin of persecution, even when owing to that most favourable of all causes, an ignorant zeal; because then too the viciousness of the means spoils all the honesty of the intention. And though it be good to be *zealously affected always in a good thing*; yet if the thing be bad, so much the more zealous as the affection is, so much the worse it is, both for the mischief it does in the world, and for the guilt of the person moved to act by it.

II. Secondly, the example of those Jews is a good warning to us, not only how sinful, but also how unpolitic a method persecution is, and how improper to compass the ends generally intended to be served by it. The two great arguments urged by that wicked consult of the Jews for putting Jesus to death were, *lest if they should let him alone, the whole world should go after him, and the Romans should come and take their place and nation*. And yet that very putting him to death was the direct occasion of both these events. Nor were they singular in such disappointments. For many instances have taught the world, that violent and sanguinary courses are by no means fitted, either for suppressing doctrines attacked by them, or for establishing and securing the persons and opinions that have recourse to them. There is a certain tenderness in human nature, disposing us to compassion and a kind concern for them whom we see treated injuriously. And the sufferings of such people, when supported with meekness and constancy, move us more effectually than most other arguments to inquire into the merits of a cause thought worth maintaining at the expense of men's lives. This made the seed of the martyrs' blood produce so plentiful a harvest of believers. And, ordinarily speaking, men cannot do the truth a greater service than to shew themselves unreasonably bitter against it. For where this is the mark of envy and opposition, God thinks himself concerned to interpose for the vindication of those who are sent upon his errand, and in the exemplary punishment of wretches so hardened that they will not consider, and so unrelenting that they will not endure either his message or his messengers. Thus we see, that, of all the corruptions which cried aloud for vengeance, both upon Jerusalem in this Gospel, and upon the spiritual Babylon in the Revelation of St. John, none were so

piercing in the ears of God, none of so fatal consequence to the authors, as that blood of the saints, which would not be pacified till dreadful and speedy revenge was executed on the places polluted with it. So ill chosen is persecution, so unlikely to succeed, whether we regard the natural consequences of the thing, or the justice and providence of Almighty God.

III. The passage before us may be of great use for vindicating the justice of God in visiting the sins of the fathers upon the children. The difficulties usually thought to lie upon such dispensations being sufficiently answered by the following considerations:

1. That the punishment inflicted on such occasions is always some temporal calamity; for God never threatens, nor can it be proved that he ever inflicts, eternal punishments upon any person whatsoever, for sins which were not of his own committing.

2. That even these temporal punishments are in their own nature capable of turning to the sufferer's advantage. For thus they manifestly do, when, by the smart and load of the most sensible afflictions, men are more powerfully awakened to bethink themselves, and change their courses; and so take warning, by the feeling of God's wrath in this life, to prevent the insupportable and infinite terrors of it in the next. And if this be not the consequence of all our present calamities, the failure is not from any want of tendency or capacity in the things themselves, but from our own want of improving them to purposes which they are abundantly qualified for serving when rightly applied.

3. That since every man hath rendered himself liable to eternal punishments by sin, it cannot reflect upon the justice of God, to lay upon him the heaviest of temporal punishments. This is not an extremity of rigour, but rather a mitigation, and a mercy. Especially, considering what was last alleged, that every temporal judgment is capable of turning to good, and having the effect of a remedy, as well as a penalty.

4. That for these reasons it can be no reflection upon the righteousness of God, that he permits those sufferings to lie upon children, which, in the natural course of things, descend to them by means of their fathers' sins. As poverty upon the family of a riotous and profuse, diseases and bodily infirmities upon the posterity of a luxurious and lewd ancestor, and the like. This is but suffering causes to produce their effects; and those too such effects, as they who smart under have deserved to feel, and yet may profit by the feeling of them.

5. But, fifthly, it very often happens that children go on and repeat and add to the sins of their fathers, by offending in the same kind and degree. This is very likely to come to pass, from a resemblance in temper and constitution, from the imitation of ill examples, (which are not only always at home and familiar to them, but corrupt with some sort of authority, as being their parents' actions,) and from the mischiefs of a negligent or vicious education. And, in such cases, the sins of children are more provoking, because

they do not take warning by their parents' wickedness, nor the threatenings of God against it; but grow bolder by it, and draw down that wrath upon themselves which the longsuffering of God forbore to execute upon former generations.

6. Lastly, such sins sometimes grow public and national, and require punishments that are public and national too. In which case the community is always the same, though the members whereof it is composed be not the same. And then there is a necessity of such punishments being inflicted in this world, because there will be no such thing as societies or bodies politic in the other world. So that upon such occasions, the sufferers and sinners are the same, because the people or kingdom, sinning and suffering in a public capacity, are to be considered as one and the same.

And such, as it is generally the condition of children visited for the iniquities of their forefathers, so was it in particular the condition of these Jews before us. The judgments here denounced were temporal only, such as had in their own nature a capacity of awakening and reclaiming them, such as they had provoked God to send upon them, by not only imitating, but far exceeding, and *filling up the measure of their fathers' iniquities*; by withstanding a clearer light, crucifying the Son of God, and murdering those that bore testimony to his resurrection: such, lastly, as were national, and proper to revenge the crimes that had been such. So that upon the whole matter, every man's own sins are the true and proper cause of his own punishments. And this vindicates the justice of providence. But the sins of ancestors may be the occasion of God's choosing to punish their descendants in this or that way, and determine him as to the kind, the degree, the time, and particular circumstances of the punishment he inflicts. All which, relating only to the manner of doing it, and not to the equity of the thing done, no way affects the justice, but only argues the wisdom of Providence. Had the parties been guilty of no sin, that of their parents should not have exposed them to suffering. But in regard themselves had deserved to suffer in this or in any other manner that their offended Lord saw fit, the parents' sins, and their repetition of them, may reasonably be allowed to quicken the season and to fix the method of punishing. So that this time and this manner should be thought more fit than any other.

IV. Fourthly, this passage gives men a fair intimation how far they may expect assistances from God, and how much depends upon themselves, in order to their conviction and obedience of the truth. He sent his prophets to Jerusalem, but she might choose whether she would believe and reverence, or whether reject and stone them. He offered to *gather her children under his wings*; but he left it in their power to accept or to refuse those kind invitations. And as the frequent repeating of such proffers was evidence sufficient of the Maker's sincerity, so the persevering in such refusals was proof undeniable of the rejector's perverseness. Now the Jewish nation are often termed

God's *peculiar, his beloved people, his vineyard, his pleasant plant*; and since God declares he had done all that could be done to make them fruitful; it must needs be of great use to have a right notion of his dealings with those men, into whose place and privilege the Christian church succeeded. For, by finding out the true causes of their barrenness, we shall be enabled to justify the present methods of providence, and in good measure to prevent our own.

Now they that shall consider this matter impartially may see very plainly, (I think,) that, in the business of salvation, God proceeds with men by methods of persuasion, but not of constraint. He allows the means that are sufficient, but he does not think himself bound to render that, which is sufficient, necessary and irresistible. He gives men opportunities of knowing their duty; he warns them of the danger of transgressing it; he does this by the ministry of his word, by repeated admonitions, by the calls and good motions of his Spirit; by the checks of their own consciences; by inflicting such temporal punishments as are fitted to awaken them into better consideration; and by threatening eternal, so sure, so terrible, as ought in all reason to affright them into better manners.

But still the success of all these methods will turn upon our complying with or holding out against them. We may improve or we may neglect the opportunities and knowledge and instruction: we may duly apprehend or we may defy the danger of disobedience: we may hearken to or we may stop our ears against the good advice of our teachers and friends: we may follow or we may stifle the motions to godliness within, and silence the reproaches of our own minds: we may be reformed with David, or we may, with Pharaoh, be more desperately hardened by afflictions: we may dread the terrors of the Lord, or we may laugh at hell, and think it but a painted fire. In short, all that is done, all that can be done in this case, supposes an honest and diligent application of our minds to render it effectual. The honour of God is concerned to see us want nothing that may dispose a sober and teachable temper to believe and to act well and wisely. For our service could not be a reasonable one, if the arguments proper to draw us to it were not superior to those that persuade the contrary. But God does not drag men without consideration, nor will he compel them to consider. For such a service could not be voluntary, nor consistent with, either his glory to accept and reward, or the principles and original constitution of human nature to pay. He forces none to sin, for that would be a blot to his own essential goodness; but he permits even the blackest crimes, to shew that he will not destroy the essential liberty of our will. He leaves us to choose our virtues, that so they may qualify us for a noble recompense; and he suffers our vices to be our own act, for otherwise they could not be capable of punishment.

To suppose that *Jerusalem's house had been left unto her desolate, if her refusing to be gathered under Christ's wings had been the positive*

and unavoidable decree of God; and that, notwithstanding so many tenders of mercy, she could not possibly have been gathered; draws consequences after it too horrid to be mentioned, and represents the Judge of all the earth farther from doing right than the most inhuman and corrupt judges in this world ever were or could be. It is to involve our Saviour in a manifest contradiction, and in effect to make him say, *How often would I have gathered thy children, and yet I never would!* And what a mockery is this now, what an indignity to all the tender inclinations he so affectionately expresses for their good, to all his tears and moving lamentations over their obstinacy and ruin, to all his solemn calls and warnings to repentance! And therefore if we will do our dear Lord reason, and believe him in any degree sincere, in his most serious protestations of this kind, we shall do well to observe from the text,

V. Fifthly, that (generally speaking) God's desertion of men is occasioned by their own disobedience. Because our Lord *would so often have gathered Jerusalem's children, and they would not*; therefore *their house was left unto them desolate*. I have already said, that these words may be intended both of a temporal and spiritual calamity. The former is the destruction of that city and nation; the latter is removing from them the light of the Gospel. But both represent to us such a withdrawing of God's favour as is the effect of men's own sins. Nothing is more plain in Scripture, than that all sufferings of this present life, how different soever in kind or degree, yet spring from the same bitter root: and nothing more obvious to the light of reason, than that a Being infinite in goodness cannot take delight in the miseries of his creatures. Whatever therefore happens of this nature, the true account of it is, that God, considered in the quality of a governor, sees such dispensations necessary to preserve the honour of his laws, and to contain his subjects in their duty, by making sometimes terrible examples of refractory and presumptuous offenders. Accordingly, through the whole course of the Jewish story, we find, not only their blessings, whether public or private, constantly suspended on the condition of obedience; but likewise, upon every remarkable judgment that befell them, express mention made of the particular provocations which moved God to such instances of severity. Here more especially, where the last dismal desolation was foretold, God is said to have determined it, because they had even exceeded all the rebellion and bloody malice of their impious forefathers. Indeed, because every method of treating them was found so perfectly in vain, that they grew not one whit the better, but a great deal the worse for all their remedies. The servants and prophets of God had been ignominiously handled, the Son of God himself crucified, the apostles and disciples of that Son risen from the dead stoned and slain with the sword, before this dire resolution of vengeance took place. Exhortations and warnings, threatenings and most importunate expostulations, had been all thrown away upon them: many signs of their approaching ruin foretold, many sore distresses entertained, without any impression or effect. And then at last, when

both the time and the pains, the ¹*digging about and dunging this fig-tree* turned all to no account; then, I say, and not till then, the patience of this Master of the field was wearied out. Then, after so many expectations defeated, after so much care and cost bestowed to no purpose, the dresser of the vineyard receives that fatal order, *cut it down, why cumbereth it the ground?*

Thus it is with regard to men's temporal concerns. And are we not, think you, greatly injurious to the goodness of Almighty God, if we suppose his kindness and longsuffering less indulgent to our spiritual? The reason given by St. Paul why Jesus said unto him, ^m*Make haste, and get thee quickly out of Jerusalem*, follows in the next words: *for they will not receive thy testimony concerning me.* And the account he and Barnabas render of their conduct at Antioch is this, ⁿ*It was necessary that the word of God should first have been preached unto you: but seeing ye put it from you, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, lo, we turn to the Gentiles.*

Now the grace of God, to render the preaching of the word effectual, is represented in the New Testament as a mercy no less necessary in order to salvation, than is the imparting of that word itself. And therefore we have reason to conclude, that the same methods of providence are observed, with regard to the inward, as to the outward expedients. We could not know our duty without the word, and we cannot comply with that word without the assistances of divine grace. To damn men therefore for breach of duties which they could not know, were not a greater barbarity, than to damn them for not performing those duties which they never had ability to perform. As then God justifies his proceedings towards sinners, by condemning them only for the breach of such things as they did or might know; so is their damnation likewise just, because inflicted only for not doing what they might have done. Consequently, the grace as well as the law of God must be imparted; though not to every man in equal measure, yet in such measure to every man, as, all circumstances considered, might have been sufficient to prevent that man's damnation. Consequently again, as the depriving men of the outward ministry of the word is a punishment for their neglect or abuse of it; so the withdrawing the inward assistances of grace, which stand in an equal degree of necessity to our salvation, proceeds from men behaving themselves negligently or contemptuously under them. And they do not perish because they never had good motions, or power to be saved; but because (as the Scripture expresses it) they resist and quench and grieve the Holy Spirit; that is, by disappointing and opposing such motions, they drive him away out of their hearts; and so provoke God, in this sense too, *miserably to destroy those wicked men, and to let out his vineyard to other, to better, more honest, more diligent, more thankful husbandmen, who will render him its fruits in their season.*

VI. From all this it follows, in the last place, that sinners are the authors, the true and proper cause, of their own destruction. They

¹ Luke xiii.^m Acts xxii. 18.ⁿ Acts xiii. 46.

must needs be so, if all the means used for their advantage do constantly require and suppose their own concurrence to render them successful; and if the grace necessary for their improvement under such means be not denied or withheld, till their own neglect or unfruitfulness have first provoked God to leave them destitute of his succour and protection. So that upon the whole matter, God deals very fairly and bountifully with his servants. And all those melancholy fears are vain and groundless, which some mistaken people, perplex themselves withal, as if the helps that should enable them to do well were never, or never would be afforded to them. We cannot indeed expect that *that which is holy should be given to dogs*, or the most precious of all *pearls* continue always to be *cast before swine*, which *trample them under foot*, and turn the gift to the dishonour of the giver. But, till our consciences can truly charge us with wilful negligence and gross contempt, the promises of the Gospel stand sure, and we may depend upon it that *God will never leave us nor forsake us*. He will not remove our candlestick, till we have refused to walk by its light; nor suffer error and impiety to intercept the lustre of his truth, till that truth hath been scornfully cast behind our backs. He will not forsake or give us up in temptations, till we have forsaken him, and cease to strive against them; that is, till ourselves take part with the tempter to betray and destroy ourselves.

Let it therefore be our care to discharge our part manfully in this spiritual warfare, for we shall be sure to *find grace to help in time of need*, and our strength will increase in proportion to our difficulties, *if we faint not*. The same blessed Jesus who appeared to the martyr of this day to support him in his sufferings, is always ready at hand to succour every sincere and resolute Christian; and no man yet ever fell from God, who did not fall from his own steadfastness. Let us settle in our minds a hearty will to do well, and the whole, in effect, is done. Let us submit to be taught, and we shall know what is the acceptable and perfect will of God. Let us take heed to the fixed measures of our duty, and consider the mighty encouragements we have to perform it faithfully; the reasonableness and the necessity of a holy life; and let us set about this important business without delay, lest the dishonour, which a scandalous conversation would reflect upon so excellent a doctrine, provoke God to *hide the things which belong to our peace* for ever from our eyes. And if at any time he sees fit to chastise us with temporal calamities or spiritual desertions, let us then especially, with humility and sorrow, lay our mouths in the dust, and acknowledge that *he is righteous in all that is come upon us*, but *we and our doings are wicked*. And, if we have any regard to our private or to our public happiness, to our present or our future safety, let us beware, above all things, of hardening our hearts by obstinacy and contempt of God's word and commandment; lest this should, by degrees, involve us in dark ignorance and blind zeal, and a furious hatred of Christ and his ministers. For wretched above all creatures are those abandoned men, whom, because they *would not obey the truth*, *God gives over to strong delusions, that they should believe a lie*. No symptom is so sad as this: no case so desperate as theirs who do things the most

unpardonable, and most highly offensive to God, at the same time that they falsely imagine themselves doing him the most acceptable service. Such is the condition of them who first reject, and then persecute the prophets. Such was theirs, who stopped their ears and ran upon St. Stephen as one not fit to live. And the end of such barbarous outrage and inflexible perverseness will be that in my text. All that our Saviour then hath left to do, is to bewail the unretrievable misery of those who will not suffer themselves to be rescued from destruction. And every such person or people will have the justest occasion to apply to their own most deplorable circumstances *this* most tragical lamentation, *O how often would my Lord have gathered me, and I would not! therefore my house is left unto me desolate.* Which wretched state God give us the grace in due time to prevent, for his sake, who shed his own blood to prevent it, Jesus Christ the righteous. To whom with the Father and the Holy Spirit, three Persons and one God, be all honour and glory for ever and ever. Amen.

ST. JOHN THE EVANGELIST'S DAY.

THE COLLECT.

MERCIFUL Lord, we beseech thee to cast thy bright beams of light upon thy Church, that it being enlightened by the doctrine of thy blessed Apostle and Evangelist Saint John may so walk in the light of thy truth, that it may at length attain to the light of everlasting life; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

THE EPISTLE. 1 St. John i.

1 *That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, of the Word of life;*

2 *(For the life was manifested, and we have seen it, and bear witness, and shew unto you that eternal life, which was with the Father, and was manifested unto us;)*

3 *That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us: and truly our fellow-*

1, 2, 3. The design of this Epistle is to acquaint you with the dispensation made use of by God, to bring men unto happiness and life eternal. A dispensation, in the purpose and decree of God from the foundation of the world, and wrought by a person who was himself God from all eternity, foretold and revealed to the

ship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ. prophets heretofore, but in this last age manifested to us in the plainest and fullest manner that could possibly be. The author of it becoming incarnate, and conversing with and instructing us in it. So that our testimony in this matter is above all exception, leaving no room for doubt or deceit, since, for the truth of what we declare, we have the utmost evidence that distinct knowledge and demonstration of sense, nay, the concurring report of all our senses that are qualified to judge of such things, can give us. And therefore what we thus assuredly know we impart unto you, that ye may be partakers in the same blessing, and united, as we are, to God and his blessed Son both, by the same grace, through Jesus Christ.

4 And these things write we unto you, that your joy may be full. 4. So that your comfort, and the rendering your joy in believing complete, is the end aimed at in sending this Epistlo.

5 This then is the message which we have heard of him, and declare unto you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all. 5. But in order hereunto it is absolutely necessary you should rightly understand the true terms upon

which this union stands. For, whatever some vain pretenders to the highest degrees of it may suggest, the doctrine given us in commission to preach is, that God is a perfectly holy being, without the least blemish, or mixture of impurity.

6 If we say that we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth : 6. It is therefore to no purpose to boast of being like or united to him, (as the Gnostics do,) so long as we indulge ourselves in a vicious course of life. For all such big pretensions are false and groundless, and a direct contradiction to the Gospel.

7 But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin. 7. The only proof to be made of this privilege belonging to us is such an imitation of his holiness as we are capable of; by abstaining from all gross habitual and wilful sins at least; and, if this be done, the blood of Jesus Christ will deliver us from the guilt and power of all sin.

8 If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. 8. A mercy, which we even then shall still have need of. For, to suppose in any circumstances (much more in such as theirs) that we are perfectly clear of sin, is a wretched delusion, and, in effect, overturns the whole scheme of the Gospel.

9 If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. 9. For this Gospel plainly supposes all men sinners, and directs the confession of their being such, and a steadfast reliance upon the truth and goodness of God, as the proper way to obtain forgiveness. Since he who cannot break his word hath engaged it for the salvation of all truly humble and penitent sinners.

10 If we say that we have not sinned, 10. So that for any man

we make him a liar, and his word is not in us. who calls himself a Christian, (but especially such filthy creatures as the Gnostics,) to say, they have been guilty of no sin, is to give the lie, not only to themselves, but to God too. It is, in effect, to renounce the Gospel, which declares such practices as theirs to be exceeding sinful, and proceeds upon a supposition that all men have been sinners, and consequently stood in need of that redemption preached by it.

COMMENT.

It hath been generally thought, and with great probability, that this Epistle, though of general use to all Christians, was yet in a more especial manner designed to refute some very gross and pernicious errors, which crept very early into the church. Of these, Simon Magus and his immediate followers were the first broachers; but, in process of time, they were improved and refined upon, and made up altogether that abominable scheme of falsehood commonly known by the name of the heresy of the Gnostics^b. A sect of men so called, from the vain pretensions they made to extraordinary degrees of illumination and knowledge, not imparted to Christians in common; such as they represented all others incapable of, who were not partakers in the same detestable principles and practices with themselves; and such as they made their own excelling in a certain mark of their being truly spiritual persons, and of a more intimate union with God and Christ, by virtue of his seed remaining in them, which rendered them his children in a peculiar manner. To those and sundry other wicked and fantastical notions, several expressions in this Epistle seem plainly to allude; which are the more particular and uncommon, because speaking in the language and idiom familiar to the persons it was written against. And it was likewise intended to undeceive the honest and orthodox, whose simplicity might be liable to danger from the pompous words and boasted perfection of these arrogant seducers. And therefore I conceive it necessary, in order to a right explanation of this first chapter, briefly to observe the false doctrines which the several parts of it were in likelihood prepared by the apostle, as an antidote, to repel the force and draw out the venom of.

1. Now first, several of those early heretics gave out, that Christ did not suffer nor die. Some of them affirming, that the senses of those who were present at the crucifixion were imposed upon by a false appearance of Jesus dying on the cross^c. Others denied that Jesus and Christ (or *the Word*) were the same; pretending that Christ, or *the Word*, was a distinct person or power, which descended upon Jesus at his baptism, continued with him till his passion, but then withdrew and left him alone; so that Jesus only, but not Christ, or *the Word*, was crucified and died. In opposition to these several falsehoods, (as pernicious as they are groundless,) the apostle begins

^b Iren. l. i. c. 16. 24; Clem. Alex. Pædag. l. i. c. 6. p. 107.

^c Iren. adv. Hæres. l. i. c. 23. cap. 25. *ibid.*; so Cerinthus. Aug. de Hæres.

his Epistle with a most solemn declaration of the truth of the Gospel history concerning this matter, and that undoubted evidence which the writers and reporters of it went upon. That not one single sense, but every senso capable of judging in the case, had received the utmost satisfaction. Alluding probably, in more especial manner, to that irrefragable demonstration of his rising with the selfsame body which they had seen nailed and wounded and expire upon the cross, mentioned by St. Luke, as given to the *eleven* when commanded by our Lord to *handle him and see*, whether he had not real flesh and bones; and when thereupon *he shewed them his hands and his feet*; and, to that satisfaction, allowed one doubting apostle in particular, who was convinced by *d thrusting his hand into the wound made by the spear in our Lord's side, and putting his finger into the print of those nails that had fastened his hands to the cross*. So that, in this assurance of our Saviour's rising the same, was included the assurance of his dying really, and in all respects the same person, with whom they had conversed familiarly during the whole time of his preaching and working miracles here on earth. And therefore *the blood of Christ is affirmed in this chapter to cleanse us from all sin*; and Jesus Christ said to be *the propitiation for the sins of the whole world*. And *he is called a liar, who denies that Jesus is the Christ*; not only he who sets up any other against him, but who separates, and makes these to be two distinct persons. But, whether this were the immediate view of the apostle or not, his general aim was certainly to shew, that they, who have left us the account of our blessed Lord's life and death, and other transactions in human nature, did not deliver this rashly or at random; but had such opportunities, such perfect knowledge, such abundant conviction, that no man can ever hope to be sure of any thing, if they were not sure that the facts they related are true. And consequently, all that credit, which the consideration of a relator's not being deceived himself can give to any testimony, is due to theirs upon this occasion; who, as St. Luke expresses it, had *many infallible proofs, and a perfect understanding of all things written by them*.

2. Another error of those heretics consisted in affirming our Lord to be a ^bmere man, and to have had no existence before his appearing in our nature. And against this those expressions may reasonably be thought levelled, which call him *the Word of Life—the Life—and that Eternal Life which was with the Father, and was* ^k*manifested unto us*; phrases which, taken by themselves, seem irreconcilable to so mean notions of him; but, when compared with the beginning of that Gospel written by this author, and considered with his manner of speaking, can scarce be fairly interpreted of any thing less than a divine being which this person, this true (Λόγος καὶ Ζωὴ) *Word and Life*, had *with the Father* before the time of his manifestation to the world.

3. Another folly observable in those heretics was their vain boasting of a more intimate communion with God^l, than any besides were ad-

^c Luke xxiv. 39, 40.

^d John xx. 27.

^e 1 John ii. 2.

^f Chap. ii. 22.

^g Acts i. 3; Luke i. 3.

^h So Ebion and Cerinthus.

ⁱ Ver. 1.

^k Ver. 2.

^l Iren. adv. Hær. l. i. cap. 1.

mitted to. And this too, notwithstanding they indulged, and even justified themselves in the practice of the most infamous and beastly vices. All which the apostle here confronts with that ^m*fellowship* which he and every true believer have with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ. A fellowship so glorious, that it ministers ⁿ*fulness* of joy, and that the noblest and most beneficial end he could propose from this Epistle was the bringing them, to whom it was addressed, to a part in it. But withal, that this could be never effected without purity of life^o, and such an imitation of those Divine excellencies^p, which all who thought worthily of God must acknowledge to be in him^q; and to be a pattern necessary for all to copy after, who would be dear to and particularly in union with him.

4. A fourth, and yet greater (if any can be greater) extravagance than the former, was, that the vilest abominations left no stain, contracted no guilt in the persons of their sect. That to the rest indeed, whom in disdain they termed men of an *animal* life and principle, the observation of moral virtues was necessary, and the contrary vices would be charged to their account^r; but for themselves, who were the only spiritual persons, they neither did nor could sin. Their condition and privileges exempted them from so mean a dispensation as that of morality; and they could no more be defiled with any vice they lived in, than the rays of light are sullied by shining into a dunghill, or gold loses its value by mingling with the filth of a common shore. To this St. John opposes the conditions upon which the true Christian ^s*fellowship* with God and Christ stands. That it is an endeavour after perfection, but not the attainment of an absolute or ^t*sinless* perfection in this life: that our freedom from sin consists in being ^u*cleansed* from it, not in having no need to be cleansed; in *confessing* and being forgiven what we do amiss, not in never doing amiss at all: and that to assume to ourselves the character of perfect innocence is to contradict the express word of God^v, and overturn the whole Gospel at once. For this propounds Christ as the foundation of our faith, because the propitiation for our sins; and promiseth eternal salvation as a mercy given to the penitent, but by no means as a recompense due to the innocent.

Some may perhaps object against this application of St. John's words, that the main assertors of two or three errors here mentioned were after him in time, and consequently we do ill to suppose this discourse directed against opinions not yet in being: but this will be of less weight, if we consider how oft the Fathers accuse these heretics of agreeing in their vicious and sensual practices, however differing in some niceties of doctrine^w; and that, even in this regard too, the seeds of all their errors are frequently declared to have been sown by Simon Magus and his immediate disciples, however others, who cultivated and brought them to maturity, might afterwards be distin-

^m Ver. 3.ⁿ Ver. 4.^o Ver. 5.^p Ver. 6.^q Ver. 7.^r Iren. ubi supra.^s Ver. 7.^t Ver. 8.^u Ver. 9.^x Ver. 10.^v Iren. l. 1. cap. 20, 30, 33. l. 2. c. 56; Cyril. Hieros. Catech. vi.; Aug. cont. Advers. Leg. et Proph. l. 2. c. 12.

guished by the improvement or more open avowing of these tenets, as though they had been the first authors and inventors of them.

Having thus briefly observed what I conceive necessary, for a right understanding of St. John's immediate design, I come now to treat of the Scripture before us in a greater latitude, and such as may be of use to ourselves and all Christians in general. To which purpose I shall employ the remainder of the present discourse upon the following heads:

I. First, to prove that the advantages of the Gospel are not possible to be attained without a pure and holy life.

II. Secondly, to shew that this holiness and purity is not so absolute as to render us, in the present state, free from all manner of sin. And then,

III. Thirdly, to observe by what methods we may hope to attain those advantages, notwithstanding the remains of sin, which do and will still cleave to the very best of Christians, while they continue here upon earth.

I. First, I shall prove the advantages of the Gospel not possible to be attained without a pure and holy conversation. One would think this so exceeding plain, that there need no pains to be taken for convincing any man who hath read or heard of the New Testament. For how peremptorily do we find it there declared, that *the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness: that the grace of God, which bringeth salvation, hath appeared to all men, teaching us, that denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world; looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people zealous of good works: that our faith must be shewn by our works, and that, though we have all knowledge, and all faith, and have not charity, we are nothing; nay, we are worse than nothing, because he that knows his Master's will, and doth it not, shall be beaten with more stripes: that the adding to our faith virtue, and temperance, and patience, and godliness, and brotherly kindness, and charity; and taking care that these things not only be, but abound in us, is the only method to prevent our being barren and unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ: that holiness is that qualification without which no man shall see the Lord: that this is the will of God, even our sanctification, that every one of us should know how to possess his vessel in cleanness and honour; not in the lusts of concupiscence, even as the Gentiles which know not God: that, for the indulging of those lusts, the wrath and vengeance of God cometh on the children of disobedience: and that they who give ear to such as would persuade them that it is possible for any whoremonger, or unclean person, or abuser of himself with mankind, or thief, or covetous man, or drunkard,*

* Rom. i. 18.

a Tit. ii. 11-14.

b James ii. 14-26.

c 1 Cor. xiii. 2; Luke xii. 47, 48; 2 Peter i. 5-8.

d Heb. xii. 14.

e 1 Thess. iv. 3, 4, 5.

f Coloss. iii. 6.

g 1 Cor. vi. 9, 10; Ephes. v. 5, 6.

or reviler, or extortioner, to inherit the kingdom of Christ and of God, are grossly ignorant in the terms of their salvation, and suffer themselves to be *deceived with vain words*.

I should never make an end, did I go about to set before you all the passages of Scripture that might be produced to the same purpose. But for this there is no occasion: for what farther satisfaction can any reasonable man desire in the point, than such express declarations as these already alleged, that an impure and wicked life is a direct contradiction to the main end of revealing the Gospel; that it opposes and defeats the design of our blessed Saviour's coming into the world; that it renders the most exalted degrees of knowledge and faith of no account, and turns what was meant our privilege into the heaviest article of our condemnation; that it incapacitates men for all that bliss and reward proposed for their encouragement; and exposes Christians to the same indignation and punishment with the vilest and darkest heathens. For it matters not much what a man is in profession, if he still continue a heathen in practice. Matters not? Yes, such professors aggravate their guilt by living in defiance of their own principles, dishonouring the name of a Christian, which they vainly take to themselves; and, by their deeds of darkness, abusing and reproaching that light, which while they fondly boast of, they yet refuse to be directed and walk by.

One would wonder indeed which way it should come to pass, that men, who think at all, should ever be prevailed upon by a delusion so fatal, and in a case so exceeding plain. Which how to account for I cannot well tell, otherwise than by saying, that the acquiring of knowledge offers violence to none of our sensual inclinations, but is an agreeable entertainment to the mind; that the improvements of this kind are what every body is not equally capable of; and therefore, as this is a distinction, more visible and more easy to us than that of subduing our lusts and passions, and excelling in moral virtues, the exercise and habits whereof people of meaner parts and attainments may come up to us in; so the affecting to distinguish ourselves this way flatters our vanity, and falls in with that very corruption of human nature which the increase of knowledge was intended for a remedy against. This seems to be a sort of reason for men's valuing themselves so highly upon abstruse and uncommon speculations in general, and in religion in particular; for laying so much more weight and bestowing so much more pains upon the brightness of the understanding than upon the rectitude of the will. Not considering in the meanwhile, how very distant these notions are from the end of religion. For religion's business is to amend the world, by making men better rather than wiser; by making them in truth wiser, that they may thereby be enabled to be better. Religion's constant voice is in effect that of our blessed Master, *"If ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them."* Since by barely knowing the very best things, and resting there, neither are ourselves nor others (truly speaking) happier.

Religion's highest excellence is to restore the defaced image of our Maker upon our souls, and, by refreshing that likeness here, to fit us for the enjoyment of the original hereafter. But still the manner of provoking us to this imitation is by proposing such of his excellencies for our pattern as represent, not the largeness of his mind, but the purity and beneficence of his nature: *'As he which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation; because it is written, Be ye holy, for I am holy: and again, Be ye merciful, as your Father also is merciful.* Which places leave us no difficulty for understanding our blessed Lord's meaning, though somewhat more ambiguously expressed, when he commands his disciples to *'be perfect, even as their Father which is in heaven is perfect.*

But are we then able to aspire to such a likeness, even in those respects, as should, in any exactness of proportion answer to those commands? Is not God in heaven, and we upon earth? And can there be any comparison between his lustre and glory, who (as the apostle says here) *'is light, and in him is no darkness at all;* and that dim shine of the brightest human virtue, which, if put in the balance with him, is but a very few removes from darkness? No, certainly. And therefore it was, that I proposed to shew, under my

II. Second head, that even the holiness and purity required under the Gospel-state is not so absolute as to preserve us, in the present condition of things, free from all manner of sin. That no more mortal must expect to be so happy, is a thing that proves itself. And therefore, instead of those testimonies whereby the Scriptures strengthen this melancholy reflection, by asking, *'Who can say, I have made my heart clean, I am pure from my sin?* by pronouncing, that *'there is none righteous, no, not one; that there is not a man upon earth who doeth good, and sinneth not; and that death hath passed upon all men, in that all have sinned:* instead, I say, of these, and many such like, though full and undeniable, yet somewhat more foreign proofs; I would make shorter work, by sending men to their own breasts for conviction. For he that at all acquaints himself [with] what passes at home must be exceeding partial and vain, not to see cause for including his own case in the number of them to whom those words of this apostle belong, *If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.*

That then, which I apprehend of much greater importance, is to put men in mind whence that unhappiness proceeds. Of which it may suffice to give this short account:

God, as the Preacher very well observes, *'made man upright, but they have sought out many inventions.* Our first parents were left in the hand of their own counsel, free to fall, but yet able to stand. This power of perfect choice, abused to evil, was so ordered, as to draw on, not only personal guilt, but a depravation both of the understanding and affections. After these infirmities, thus contracted, it was that all mankind sprung from them; who consequently must partake of

¹ 1 Pet. i. 15, 16.

² Luke vi. 36.

³ Matt. v. 48.

^m Ver. 5.

ⁿ Prov. xx. 9.

^o Psalm xiv. 1.

^p Eccles. vii. 20.

^q Rom. v. 12.

^r Eccles. vii. 29.

the filth and frailties of their common source. So that none of their posterity are any longer the same that either Adam was at first, or that Eve was, who took her substance from him before he had transgressed. The appetites of the lower soul (as some distinguish) are in perpetual disposition to rebel; and there is a bias even upon reason itself, drawing us down to the animal life and its gratifications, even against our better sense, and the much more weighty arguments that plead, but are not so well heard, for the spiritual. In the latter consists our duty and happiness, in the former, our guilt and danger. Our danger at all times; because by indulging our sensual appetites, even within measure, they are apt to get ground upon us: our guilt, as many times as we gratify them beyond measure, or in opposition to the dictates of reason and religion. This renders our Lord's reflection upon his disciples applicable to all his followers, that, in the hour of temptation, watchfulness and prayer are indispensably necessary, because, even when *the spirit is most willing, the flesh is found by sad experience weak*. This is in substance St. Paul's meaning, by the *warrings of the mind, the lustings of the spirit against the flesh and the flesh against the spirit*, of which he often complains. And the difference between one man and another in this respect, is not that the bad have these lustings and weaknesses, and the good have not; that the bad are always vanquished in the war, and the good never: but that the one follows the stream of his vitiated affections, and the other strives against it. The bad takes part with the enemy against himself, and the good either withstands so manfully as to conquer, or, if overcome by surprise or violent assault, rallies again; and never makes the least truce with a foe, from whom nothing, he knows, can save him but continual and obstinate resistance.

Hence is it that *in many things we offend all*; in many done amiss, which ought not, need not to have been committed; in many not done well, which might have been performed, and should not have been neglected. And, all this notwithstanding, we are called upon to walk *in the light, as God is in the light*, because the keeping so glorious an example in view will animate our endeavours after the utmost perfection we are capable of attaining. And we are esteemed to *walk in the light, as he is in the light*, when we avoid and abhor darkness and its deeds, and so demean ourselves, that our blemishes and faults are not from the perverseness of our will, but the imperfections and frailties of our nature. For, were there no such distinction as this to be made, how fruitless, how impertinent were it for St. John to tell men of a *fellowship with God and Christ*, a *fellowship* to be maintained by being like to God; and yet to tell these men that they are sinners! It therefore follows evidently, that all sinners, in the largest sense of that word, are not shut out from the advantages of the Gospel. Which makes it of great use rightly to understand my

III. Third head. What methods those advantages are secured by, notwithstanding the remains of sin, which do, and always will, cleave

* Matt. xxvi. 41.

† Rom. vii. 23; Gal. v. 16, 17.

u James iii. 2.

x Ver. 6.

to the very best of Christians while they continue here upon earth. Of this we are informed, ver. 7: *The blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin*: and yet somewhat more particularly at the 9th verse: *If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness*. The sum of both which texts may be reduced to two points: one, that to the alone sufferings and death of Christ men's deliverance from their sins and the dismal consequences of them is truly owing: the other, that this deliverance is not afforded to all sinners promiscuously, but requires some conditions to qualify us for it. These are, each of them, points too copious to be treated of in their due extent at present, and therefore I will but just leave them upon you with some brief observations; such especially as are most apposite to what hath been delivered under the foregoing particulars.

1. First, as the effect of *Christ's blood* is here represented by *cleansing*, it argues, not only that sin is the stain and defilement of our nature, but refers us also to the sprinklings of the blood of the Levitical sacrifices for a right understanding of the benefit Christians reap by it. Now the legal pollutions, under that economy, did cut men off from all friendship with God, till the lustrations appointed for each case had passed upon the body of the person contracting them. In like manner our souls are looked upon as sullied and abominable in the sight of God, till the application of the blood of this only meritorious sacrifice hath washed them from their filth. Again, the mark of men being then in favour and friendship with God was their right of coming into his presence, approaching his altar, and communicating in his worship with the rest of their brethren; and thus Christians, under the Gospel, are then in communion with God, when they lead such lives as qualify them for an acceptable participation in those services and privileges which are the glory of the true members of Christ's body the Church. This makes it, upon the matter, indifferent whether we read those words at the seventh verse, *Then have we fellowship with one another*, or, (as some copies,) *Then have we fellowship with him*: since communion with true Christians is communion with God; and they *who walk not in the light*, that is, who lead not the lives of Christians, however they may seem to be, yet are not really united either to the one or the other.

2. Secondly, there is this preeminence due to the blood of Jesus Christ, above any thing directly typified of it by the purifications under the law; that, whereas those had all a respect to faults already past, this looks forward, and is of mighty efficacy for the time to come. It was our propitiation, and thus it procures our pardon from the guilt of sin; but it hath likewise purchased for us the grace and assistances of the Holy Spirit, and thus it arms and relieves us against the power of sin. For this Spirit is the earnest and proof of our adoption; the *sending it forth into our hearts* is expressly said to be a consequence of our sonship. But that sonship is again the consequence

of our deliverance from bondage; and this ^adeliverance is as expressly ascribed to that death of his, which destroyed him that had the power of death, and, till this had burst our chains, held us in fear and slavery. So truly may that blood be said to *cleanse*, whose virtue does not only wash out the old, but preserve us from returning to our mire, and prevents the taking new stains.

3. Thirdly, this shews us the exceeding goodness as well as the justice of Almighty God, in contriving such means for restoring our happiness as leave no reasonable imputation upon the hardship of losing it. The defects and disabilities which indispose us to goodness, and render a perfect obedience now impossible, were derived down to us from another; the repair of these ruins of nature by grace, the acceptance of an obedience imperfect, when sincere, the remission of our faults, and compassion for our failings, are likewise derived down upon us from another^b. The misery was not personally our own act, the rescue from it is not our own neither. Thus far the cases are at least equal, and the justice of God vindicated. But the differences which illustrate his goodness upon this occasion are manifest and great. The offence by which judgment came upon us was one, was actually another's, and ours only as naturally included in that common representative. But the righteousness by which justification comes upon us is not that of any natural parent. It is no farther ours than as we are, by a most gracious construction, reckoned to partake with Him, not from whom we came, but who came to us; one who condescended to assume our human, that so we might be admitted to a share of his divine nature. Nor was this justification from our original alone, but from actual, from our own, from wilful, from infinite, as the apostle says here, *from all sin*. At least it may, it must be so, provided we be not wanting to ourselves. For that should be taken care of. We have done a great deal to make ourselves wretched, and to break with God; and something is still left for us to do, in order to retrieving our bliss and returning into friendship with him; and how inexcusable we are, if this be left undone, will appear,

4. Fourthly, from the condition required at the 9th verse; *If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness*. That the true purport of this condition be not mistaken, it is fit we remember, that nothing is more usual in Scripture than to express a man's duty by some very considerable branch of it. Thus the whole of religion is often implied in the love or the fear of God; and thus confession here no doubt denotes, not only an acknowledgment of our faults, but all that deep humility and shame, all that afflicting sorrow and self-condemnation, all that resolution against them, all that effectual forsaking them for the future, all that diligence to grow and abound in the contrary virtues and graces, all that entire dependence on the merits and sacrifice of our crucified Redeemer, all that application of his word and sacraments, ordained to convey this cleansing blood to us, which accompany

^a Heb. ii. 14, 15.

^b Rom. v. 12-19.

such acknowledgment, when serious and to purpose, and which are elsewhere represented as constituent parts of repentance, and necessary predispositions to forgiveness. In the meanwhile, as the mention of this singly was sufficient, so was no part of repentance so proper to be mentioned as this, because directed to persons vain and absurd enough to suppose themselves void of sin, and thereby evacuating, so far as in them lay, the whole Gospel of Christ. For the Gospel propounds a salvation to all men, to be obtained only by his death. A death undergone on purpose that it might propitiate for sin, and consequently a death needless to them who had no sin. A death of none effect to any who do not allow the necessity and trust to the virtue of it for the remission of their own sins. But to all who do, so beneficial, that God can as soon renounce his word as disappoint their reasonable expectations: his promise is passed, and he is *faithful*. The Judge of all the earth cannot but do right: his Son hath paid the debt, and he is *just*. He will not therefore require from the principal what the Surety hath already discharged. So sure are we to be happy, if we be but sensible how miserable we have made ourselves: so sure to be miserable, if puffed up with vain confidences in our own real impotence, and insensible, that to Jesus Christ alone we owe the very possibility of our being happy.

Let then these considerations be so laid together, that the result of them all may be that fulness of a solid and well grounded joy, which the apostle of this day designed the words, from whence they have been taken, should diffuse through every soul that receives them. Let us hold in highest estimation that privilege, which is indeed inestimable; the mystical union with God the Father and his blessed Son; the glorious ingredient of a believer's both present and future happiness, and therefore the best ingredient of his present, because the earnest and undoubted pledge of his future and eternal. But let us consider withal, that to be united to God supposes a likeness to him in all those excellencies that are imitable by creatures, and in all those proportions to which such creatures as we can raise our poor imperfect and still sinful selves. For such, we must remember, we yet are, even after our most sincere, our most successful endeavours to be holy. And therefore, as we must not presume upon the promises and love of God without *cleansing ourselves from all filthiness of flesh and spirit, and perfecting holiness in his fear*; so neither must we forget, that all our cleanness is from *him who hath washed us in his own blood*; that humility, and taking shame for our sins, and acknowledging our own unworthiness, as they are most suitable to our circumstances, so are they most for our advantage. There being no instance which does more remarkably than this, of recommending to the favour and entitling to the mercy of God, make good that maxim of our blessed Master, *He that exalteth himself shall be abased, and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted*.

And if these considerations and their effects can be more season-

able at one time than another, is there any fitter opportunity for them than the festival we now celebrate?—when the beloved disciple does, as it were, again lean on his Lord's breast, and join our praises for the virtues of the servant with our adorations for the birth of the Master? That birth, which was so circumstantiated as to intimate how detestable sin and sensuality is to him; that birth, which *manifested the life, till then hid in God*, that we might thenceforth live in and by and to him; that birth, which is so full of confusion to the proud and arrogant, to those that do not, or that will not, see their vileness and frailty; but so full of comfort and holy trust to the penitent and the humble. For, them that feel and acknowledge their own misery and pollution, this new-born Saviour will cleanse by his blood; them that lament and labour against their own infirmities he will assist and strengthen by his grace. Let us then cast ourselves entirely upon him, who, had he not loved us, would neither have taken nor shed his blood for us. Approach him as your only trust and refuge, for what else can you place your confidence in? Not in men, though they may appear to be something, for no *'man may redeem the soul of his brother, or make atonement unto God for him.* Not in yourselves, whom you may soon know to be nothing. Nothing at the best, since all the evil in you is worse than so, and all the good is no better than so. For, *let you have laboured never so abundantly, still it was not you, but the grace of God that is in you.* A grace given to the humble; a spiritual sustenance, of which the *poor in heart shall eat and be satisfied, and their soul shall live for ever*; while the conceitedly rich and full, the men who think they want it not, though then they want it most, shall be sent empty away. Shut not then the door of mercy against yourselves by false notions of your own righteousness, but give the glory of your cleansing to that inestimable blood, which alone can take away sin; and be careful so to value the blessing, as never to forfeit again that fellowship *which the Father and his Son Jesus Christ hereby vouchsafe to receive you into*; a fellowship of holiness here, but that, alas! imperfect, and too often interrupted; yet this to be completed in a fellowship hereafter in heaven of happiness immutable, endless, and inexpressible. Whither God of his infinite mercy bring us, in his due time, to whom he honour and glory henceforth for evermore. Amen.

THE GOSPEL. St. John xxi. 19.

19 *Jesus saith unto Peter, Follow me.* 19. After Jesus had thrice required from Peter a profession of loving him, (thus to make some sort of reparation for his having thrice denied him,) and foretold his martyrdom, for the glory of God and the truth of the Gospel; he riseth out of his place, and putting himself into motion commands Peter to follow him.

20 *Then Peter, turning about, seeth the disciple whom Jesus loved following; which* 20. Peter did as he was bidden, and John, (for he

also leaned on his breast at supper, and said, Lord, which is he that betrayeth thee? is the person meant here,) though not bidden, did so too.

21. Peter seeing him saith to Jesus, Lord, and what shall this man do? 21. Which Peter observing, and being curious to know how a person so familiar with and particularly dear to our Lord should be disposed of, asks what should become of him.

22. Jesus saith unto him, If I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee? 22. To this question Jesus did not think fit to return any direct answer; but such

an one as checked St. Peter's curiosity, by commanding him to look well to the discharge of his own duty, without troubling himself about the fate in reserve for other people, which was no part of his concern.

23. Then went this saying abroad among the brethren, that that disciple should not die; yet Jesus said not unto him, He shall not die; but, If I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee? 23. From this ambiguous manner of our Lord's expressing himself, some of the disciples imagined that St. John should never die, but

be found among those that shall be alive at Christ's second coming. (See 1 Cor. xv. 51, 52; 1 Thess. iv. 17.) Whereas, in truth, those words of Jesus imply no such matter, but (if they determine any thing, which they seem rather not to do) foretell, that that disciple should survive the destruction of Jerusalem, which is probably believed to be called our Lord's coming (as a most eminent judgment, and instance of his truth and power) in sundry places of the New Testament.

24. This is the disciple which testifieth of these things, and wrote these things: and we know that his testimony is true. 24. Now the person concerned in the account that went before, is the very

author of this Gospel; whose credit may very safely be depended upon.

25. And there are also many other things which Jesus did, the which, if they should be written every one, I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that should be written. Amen. 25. For he hath been so far from exceeding, that he does indeed come short of the truth. The miracles and memorable actions related

here being so small a part of those done by Jesus, that (to use a figure of speech very common and allowable on such occasions) the whole of them is not possible to be told, or to be comprehended if it could be told.

COMMENT.

IN order to do right, both to the festival which the Church of Christ this day celebrates, and to the portion of Scripture propounded here, as a proper subject for our meditation upon it, I shall first give a brief account of the saint we are now commemorating, and then consider this passage, so far as it concerns him in particular.

^h St. John was the son of Zebedee, and brother of James, called (by

distinction from another of the same name, and an apostle likewise) James the Great. His mother was Salome, mentioned by St. Mark to have been one of those devout women, who, having ministered to Jesus in Galilee, and waited on him in his journey from thence to Jerusalem, were present at his crucifixion, and prepared spices to anoint his dead body; but, when they came with that intent to the sepulchre, they saw a vision of angels, who gave them the first joyful news of his being risen again. The place of his birth was one of the sea towns in Galilee, probably Bethsaida or Capernaum: where he, together with his father and brother, exercised the fishing trade, till called off by our Lord to be from thenceforth one of his constant attendants. For the ready obedience to which call, expressed by *leaving his ship and his father* and forthwith following *Jesus*, he seems to have been prepared by the previous instructions of John the Baptist. It being probably concluded from the manner of his speech, when having occasion to mention himself in the Gospel of his own writing, that he was *that other disciple* who is said in the first chapter to have been present with Andrew when John declared Jesus to be *the Lamb of God*, and thereupon to have followed him to the place of his abode. But afterwards, it is certain he returned to his calling; and therefore this invitation, and the compliance with it, was quite different, both in time and nature, from that at the sea of Galilee, when our Saviour had actually entered upon the exercise of his prophetic office, and made choice of him and his brother James, among those disciples which he then began to gather to himself.

Among these he was not only one of the twelve apostles, but one of the three even of that number distinguished by particular marks of favour above the rest. To these, that is to Peter, this apostle, and his brother James, our blessed Lord gave surnames. To these two brethren, that of *sons of thunder*; denoting possibly the powerfulness of their ministry; either with regard to its efficacy upon the minds of the hearers, or the undaunted courage of the speakers, or the depth of those mysteries they should teach, as from the voice of God; for so thunder was wont to be esteemed and called. To these our Lord allowed a part in some of his more private miracles and retirements, to which the other apostles had not the honour of being admitted. Thus, in the restoring Jairus' daughter to life, *when he came to the house, no man was suffered to go in with him, save Peter and James and John, and the father and mother of the maiden*. When he thought fit to exhibit a specimen of the excellence of his glory, *in his wonderful transfiguration on the holy mount*, these were made choice of to be eyewitnesses of his majesty; present at his conference with Moses and Elias, and hearers of that voice which declared him the *beloved Son of God*. And again, when the sorrows of his soul were enlarged, and his human nature almost overwhelmed with the load of sufferings which he saw then attacking him, these were the only companions of

ⁱ Matt. iv. 21, 22.^k John i. 35—40.^l Mark iii. 16, 17.^m Luke viii. 51.ⁿ Matt. xvii; 2 Pet. i. 16, 17, 18.^o Matt. xxvi.

his solitude and most retired devotions. PThus whatever was most remarkable in their blessed Master's actions, which he saw convenient for a season to conceal, was deposited as a secret in these faithful hands: the most convincing evidences of his Godhead and his manhood, the brightest lustre of the one, and the lowest humiliation of the other; all indeed that could speak a particular confidence and kindness, was reserved for a retreat with those select friends; of whom, though so few, St. John had constantly the privilege to make one.

Nay, even of those three, he seems in some respects to have the preference. To be known by that most desirable of all titles, *the disciple whom Jesus loved*; to have such intimacy and interest with this blessed Master, as should put the rest of his brethren upon choosing him their spokesman, for getting satisfaction to a question which none of them durst ask, though all were in pain to have it resolved: these were such honours as St. John might well desire to be remembered by. Ten thousand pompous titles had swelled indeed his Gospel, but in substance added nothing to the character of the author, or the credit of the work, comparable to this short description of himself in the Scripture now under consideration—*the disciple whom Jesus loved, which also leaned on his breast at supper, and said, Which is he that betrayeth thee? This is the disciple which testifieth of these things, and wrote these things.* But of this I may have occasion to take notice by and by. At present I only add, that a more convenient proof of his particular affection could scarce be given, ^rthan that of committing to this disciple's comfort and care his sorrowful holy mother; the tenderest concern of that kind to be sure, and such as even the agonies of death and the cross could not yet render the best and meekest of sons unmindful of.

What the reasons might be of our Lord's favour to St. John in a degree so visible and so particular, as should give him right to a title which otherwise it would have savoured too much of invidious and arrogant boasting to assume to himself, we are nowhere in Scripture told. Of those who have undertaken to conjecture, some have attributed it to this apostle's eminent modesty, others to his unspotted chastity, others think it an indulgence due to his youth, and the pregnancy of that in knowledge and virtue; but none seem to have thought more probably of the matter than they who impute this affection and indulgence to nearness of relation, and a peculiar sweetness of disposition conspiring to recommend him. The former, though so close as that of being sister's or cousin german's son to our Lord, had not alone indeed been cause sufficient for preference in the good graces of such a Master. (Which possibly might be part of our Lord's meaning ^sin his answer to that famous request of this apostle and his mother, to be considered hereafter ^tin due place.) But the latter, wherein both the constant strain of his own writings and the concurrent testimonies of all antiquity declare him to have excelled,

^p Mark v. 43; Matt. xvii. 9.

^q Ver. 20, 24.

^r John xix. 26.

^s Matt. xx. 20, 23.

^t Gospel for St. James's Day.

might well be allowed to render him very dear to that Lord who is love itself. And such likeness of disposition, attended with such proximity in blood, as it is a natural and reasonable motive for some difference to be made, (and therefore not unbecoming even the Son of God made man,) so was it no disparagement to the rest of the apostles, whose circumstances in either of these respects were not alike, that a greater intimacy and freedom uncommon should be permitted to St. John: that he, who *"loved all his own, and loved them unto the end,* did yet discover somewhat of inequality in his likings and conversations; enough to prove himself of the same human affections with us; enough to justify one, from among his most familiar friends, in the honour of signalizing his memory to all ages, and leaving no manner of doubt who was pointed at by *the disciple whom Jesus loved.*

But though the Holy Ghost did not think fit to acquaint us with the particular motives, he hath not spared to record the grateful resentments of this love. Those were expressed in many instances of fervent zeal for the honour, returns of tenderness for the person, and undaunted courage in the service of so kind a Master. The first of these indeed we find our Lord twice rebuking. *Once as too nicely jealous, when forbidding one to proceed in casting out devils, though he did it in Christ's name, because he was not one of his retinue. †A second time, when the affront of not receiving Jesus in a Samaritan village had provoked his and his brother's indignation, to ask, whether fire should not be called down from heaven, to make them such another example of despising a great prophet as God had once suffered ‡Elijah to make of some who contemned his authority. In both which cases, that heat must be ascribed to the over-hastiness of an honest but not sufficiently instructed zeal; and our Lord's reproofs accordingly shew that want of temper to have proceeded from want of such judgment and consideration as afterwards calmed this disciple into meekness and charity; and left him so far from desiring to promote his Master's honour by the danger and death of others, *as to declare it his duty to purchase the lives and safeties of the brethren with the sacrificing his own; and this too, as the best and most becoming expedient for approving the sincerity of his gratitude and love to Christ.

The tender concern he bore to his Lord's person appears abundantly from his behaviour at a time most proper for making proof of it, that of his Master's sufferings and disgrace. And here I will not venture to carry this proof so high as some have done, by affirming St. John to be that young man, who, when Jesus was apprehended in the garden, †followed with a linen cloth cast about his body, and afterwards escaped from those in pursuit of him, by quitting his garment and fleeing naked. As the Scripture hath not, so the reasons of those that have fixed this upon St. John are not, to my apprehension, sufficient to balance those on the contrary. The name

* John xlii. 1.

* Luke ix. 49, 50.

† Ver. 51, 56.

‡ 2 Kings i.

† John iii. 16; iv. 11.

‡ Mark xiv. 51.

of *young man*, as commonly then used, could not well belong to St. John, who, dying about sixty-eight years after our Lord, by computation the ninety-eighth or ninety-ninth of his own age, must have been now upwards of thirty, though younger than any other of the apostles. Not only so, but this apostle himself tells us our Lord treated with the officers for the safe dismissal of those with him; and that allowance they took the advantage of. For, after the time of Simon Peter's wounding the high priest's servant, and the wound healed by our Saviour, is to be understood the disciples shifting for themselves to follow, as St. Mark hath placed it. And that general expression seems to include St. John, when the same Evangelist, at the verse before, says, *They all*, that is (as St. Matthew) *all the disciples, forsook him and fled*. Whereupon immediately follows this account of the young man; such as I could imagine refers not to the particulars of the flight of one among the all before mentioned, but rather to a person and action distinct from theirs, and another incident that happened at the seizing of Jesus by Judas and his company.

Some greater appearance there is (whether we regard the phrase used in relating it or the authority of those interpreters who give into it) ^dthat St. John was that other disciple who accompanied Peter to the high priest's palace, and, by his acquaintance in the family, got him admitted in to see what was done to Jesus. Though his affection, which had brought him thither, was, St. Chrysostom thinks, too weak for his fear, and that he could not yet conquer this so far as to suffer himself to stay in a place of so much danger.

However that were, we find him afterwards more master of this passion, attending our blessed Lord at his crucifixion ^ein company with his holy and afflicted mother, taken notice of by him in his last moments and dying agonies, receiving that mother as his own charge, and conducting her to his own home. With whom, some historians tell us, he lived in Jerusalem till the time of her death, which they compute to have been about fifteen years after.

After our Saviour's resurrection, he was the first apostle who came to his empty tomb, ^frunning thither upon the intelligence brought to him and Peter, that the stone was taken away, and the sepulchre open; and outrunning Peter, though not entering into it till Peter had first led the way. But then, viewing all the circumstances of the place, the clothes, and the manner how they were disposed, and professing the full conviction this view had given him.

When our Lord appeared to his disciples ^gat the sea of Galilee, he was the first who discerned it was Jesus; and gave notice of it to Simon Peter, between whom and him there seems to have been all along a more particular intimacy and friendship. At Peter's request it was that John undertook to ask of our Lord, ^hwho it was, that should betray him; and in concern for John it was, that Peter, when given to understand by what death he himself should glorify God, had

^c Mark xiv. 50; Matt. xxvi. 56. See Cajetan. Jentac. vi. Qu. 4.

^d John xviii. 15, 16. Compare ch. xx. 3, 4, 8.

^e John xix. 26, 27.

^f John xx. 3, 8.

^g John xxi. 6.

^h John xiii. 24.

the unseasonable curiosity to demand, 'what that man should do. 'These were the two, sent by our Lord before him to prepare the passover; these the two, sought out by Mary Magdalene to impart the news of the grave being open; these the two, who, after the descent of the Holy Spirit, went up together into the temple, and there cured the impotent man; these justified their preaching in the name of Jesus, and declared their resolution to persist in doing so, suffered imprisonment with the rest of their brethren, rejoiced that they were counted worthy of shame upon so glorious an occasion; these were made choice of by the rest of their body 'to go and confirm the new converts at Samaria, who had been instructed in the faith of Christ by the preaching of Philip. And, lastly, these two and James are said to be esteemed pillars; from them St. Paul declares "he received the right hand of fellowship at Jerusalem, and that with them it was agreed what part he should take in the propagation of the Gospel. All which are instances that speak a more than ordinary union between these two yokefellows, a mighty deference to their authority, and an invincible courage putting them forward, and, as it were, leading on their brethren, as oft as any encounter of hardship for the service of their Master offered itself to them. Which was a third good quality I instanced in, as a testimony, how desirous our apostle was to make some becoming returns of that love whereof he partook so largely.

No doubt he did the same in the succeeding years of his life, though the Scripture have left us no farther intimation of it than that address made to the churches of the lesser Asia, which makes it probable that his labours had been bestowed in founding some and confirming others of them. Of the latter sort might possibly be Laodicea, but certainly "Ephesus was, where we read of St. Paul first propagating the Gospel, and leaving the care of the Church there to Timothy, the first bishop of it. The other five, mentioned in the Revelation, are generally thought to derive their being from St. John, who is likewise believed to have preached in Parthia, his first Epistle anciently bearing the title of *The Epistle to the Parthians*. His chief residence seems to have been at Ephesus, a city of exceeding great resort, both upon the account of its traffick, and the convenience of its port to travellers from the parts of Syria and Egypt, or thither from Greece, Macedonia, and Pontus, &c. So that the Apostle could nowhere be seated more commodiously for dispersing the knowledge of his doctrines to natives of several nations and quarters at once.

After many (some say twenty-seven) years spent here, he was by order of Domitian, who had then set on foot a severe persecution, sent to Rome, and there, as Tertullian relates, (in a manner importing the fact abundantly notorious,) cast into a caldron of burning "oil. But God, who had reserved him for farther services to the truth, brought

ⁱ John xxi. 21.

^k Luke xxii. 8; John xx. 2; Acts iii. iv. v.

^l Chap. viii.

^m Gal. ii. 9, 10.

ⁿ Iren. lib. iii. cap. 3; Acts xix; 1 Tim. i.

^o Tertull. calls it Oleum Ignium, lib. de Prescript. cont. Hæret.

him safe out of it. The emperor, unmoved at this miraculous deliverance, banished him into Patmos^p, a small island in the Archipelago. Here it was that those visions were, many of them, if not all, manifested to him, and here that the ancients say they were written too in that book called his Revelation. For the place we have his own testimony, for the time that of Irenæus, who puts it near the end of Domitian's reign. But a modern critic of great name supposes part of those visions to have been both seen and written at Ephesus, whither he returned in the reign of Nerva. During this second residence it was that he wrote this Gospel at the request of the Asian^s bishops. Relating therein several passages of our Saviour's life (particularly in the beginning of his ministry) which the other Evangelists had omitted; and setting himself to prove the eternal existence of the Word or Son of God, in opposition to the heresies of Ebion and Cerinthus, and the Nicolaitans, who denied our Lord's divinity. About the same time his Epistles are thought to have been written; the first whereof with what design hath been observed before.

Here he is said to have avoided the bath in which Cerinthus washed, lest the judgment of God should destroy him when found in company with so vile a heretic. Such abhorrence had then the best men such dreadful apprehensions of them who presumed to deny our Saviour's divinity, as not to think it either becoming or safe to mingle, even in civil conversation, with men so professed enemies to the truth. Here St. John lived to a very old age, some say to ninety-eight or nine, others to a hundred or a hundred and twenty years. And when decayed, so far as to be disabled from longer exhortations, he used in the public assemblies to inculcate this short but comprehensive lesson, *Little children, love one another*. Here, lastly, he died a natural death, and was buried near the city. A martyr in disposition, and so far in fact as his imprisonment from the Jews and his boiling caldron and banishment from the Romans could make him. ^aA wonderful pattern of holiness and charity, and a writer so profound as to deserve, by way of eminence, the character of St. John the Divine. And yet such was his humility, that in all his writings he is remarkable for never mentioning his own name, but always speaking of himself under some ambiguous title; and of his character only as The Elder. Which is thought to have ministered occasion for doubting some time whether the second and third Epistles were his, or another John's, commonly known by the name of John the Elder. But the Church, upon mature deliberation, have received them into the canon; moved by the several marks which were thought sufficient discoveries of their being dictated by the same Spirit with the other undoubtedly genuine works of this divine author. Let thus much suffice for the first head I proposed; viz. to shew, from a very brief account of this holy Apostle and Evangelist in general, what reason the Church of

^p Rev. i. 9.^a Lib. 5. c. 30.^r Grotius in Apoc.^e Euseb. Hist. lib. iii. Hieron. Script. Eccles. Catalog. Iren. l. iii. c. 11.^t Hieron. in Gal. vi. 10. ^u Euseb. Hist. l. iii. c. 25. Hieron. in Catalog. Euseb. l. iii. c. 15.

Christ hath to pay perpetual honour to his memory. I pass now to consider a little more particularly that small portion of his Gospel appointed to be read on this occasion.

Now this plainly consists of two parts. The one, relating to St. Peter in the question he asked concerning St. John, and the reproof of such unseasonable and useless curiosity, with which I forbear at present to concern myself. Partly *because I have elsewhere treated of that matter more at large, but chiefly because it is only introductive of that other part which immediately affects our Evangelist. And therefore, confining my discourse to this, I shall employ the remainder of it upon those few following observations:

1. First, the care he takes here to prevent any mistakes concerning himself which might and did arise from a misconstruction of those doubtful words concerning him, *⁊ If I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee?* Upon this occasion he acquaints us, *²there went a saying abroad among the brethren, that that disciple should not die.* But how weak and ungrounded such saying was, the next period informs us, *Yet Jesus said not unto him, He shall not die; but, If I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee?* To make this opinion look more probable, the particular affection of Jesus, the extreme old age by which St. John long survived the rest of the Apostles, and the want of any particular account of the manner of his death, might in some measure contribute. But still all these arguments, when closely considered, will be found to import no such matter.

For, first, whatever value a privilege of this kind might bear with men who had but a weak belief and imperfect notions of a future and better state, yet to an apostle, firm in his assurance of another life, satisfied that *to be absent from the body was to be present with the Lord*, exposed to perpetual dangers and persecutions during his continuance here, and detained from the participation of that joy which he knew to be prepared for a recompense of such labours and sufferings; to such a one, I say, the being exempted from the common fate of his brethren deserves to be esteemed not a privilege but a punishment. Of which they, who maintain this to be St. John's case, seem sufficiently sensible; when, instead of acknowledging his death, they take refuge in a fabulous sleep, and a translation like that of Enoch and Elias; for which no authentic history furnishes, and this most authentic of all histories cuts off, any manner of foundation. In such fictions as these men follow their own carnal sense of things, and imagine the pains of dying to be some terrible calamity, from which it was very agreeable to suppose a disciple so high in his Master's favour delivered, like that patriarch and that prophet heretofore. But the apostles and primitive Christians had very different sentiments from these. They, armed with the consolations of the Holy Spirit, and the supporting prospects of the joy set before them, had learnt to despise, to embrace, to rejoice, to triumph in tortures and death. And the convincing the world of a future and a glorious state,

reserved for good men when removed hence, was a point to which the translations of Enoch and Elias might be necessary, under a more imperfect dispensation; but that of an apostle was no longer so under the clearer revelations of the Gospel, and the undeniably attested example of a crucified Jesus, risen from the dead, and ascended into heaven.

Again, it is easy to discern the effects of a wise and good providence, in lengthening out the age of this apostle, and at last taking him away by a natural death. The former furnished more abundant opportunities for the influence of his teaching and example, and for ascertaining the truth to many more eminent persons who succeeded in the Church, and had the advantage of consulting and conversing with him. This added to the weight and authority of the three other evangelists, whose writings he is expressly said to have perused and approved. The same may reasonably be presumed of the Acts and Epistles, all which were in being long before his decease. This furnished us with a more explicit account of our Lord's divinity, and the union of two natures in the person of Jesus Christ; occasioned by the errors of those bold heretics who were his contemporaries. This supplied us with many facts wholly omitted, and with more full relations of some, not so distinctly recited by the evangelists that wrote before him. In a word, this derives mighty veneration upon the canon of Scripture; that nothing is received there but what an eye and ear-witness of what Jesus did and spoke did either write himself, or declare to be written faithfully, as to the historical part of the Gospel; and for the rest, that the authors were all dead, and their treatises communicated freely. So that here was no room for imposing upon the world either in fact or doctrine or discipline, while there remained still living one who could neither want the ability nor the inclination to detect the cheat. And if we do but reflect at all, we cannot but be satisfied that these were mighty benefits and strengthenings to the Christian cause; a cause that suffers still from the perverseness of wicked seducers and the unbelief of ignorant unsettled minds. But how much more must it in likelihood have suffered, had not this apostle survived to see and arm us against the seeds of a poison not yet killed; to give light to them who might otherwise have put on darkness for a cloak, and to assert the true antiquity of principles in religion, which some would fain persuade us are only the tyrannical impositions of councils or the cobwebs of later schoolmen!

And as the length of this Apostle's life, so the manner of his death also, had its usefulness. The going away from men so full of days, and in perfect quiet, is or ought to be a warning to the violent and the great, the oppressors and persecutors of this world, that there is an overruling Power above, which all their malice cannot defeat; that under the protection of this Power good people are; and therefore, farther than this sees fit, to permit, they cannot be prevailed over: that God will never suffer his truth to fail, but get himself glory of all its enemies. And, on the other hand, that they who are heartily

disposed to suffer for their duty shall not lose their crown for not actually doing so. St. John was no doubt esteemed to *drink of Christ's cup, and to be baptized with his baptism*, though neither beheaded like his brother James, nor crucified like his companion Peter. Let but our death be the death of the saints, and be the kind what it will, it is certainly precious in the sight of God.

These seem to be very natural inferences from the circumstances of our apostle, and substantial reasons for God's dealing thus with him. But to build upon these an opinion of his being an exception to the fate of common mortals, can be imputed to no cause so justly as to the rashness of a preposterous zeal. And to urge the passage now at hand in vindication of that opinion, is not only to offer manifest violence to the text, but to fix upon it a sense which the party concerned declares belonged not to it; it is to advance a fiction, in despite of that solemn warning which he, according to his usual modesty, hath left against any such foreign and forced interpretations as he takes notice to have already obtained with some. But such were then more excusable than now they can be, after St. John had thus forbidden posterity to make them.

What remains of this portion of Scripture is a declaration, that the matters contained in the Gospel written by St. John may be depended upon for truth. What we have to this purpose at the twenty-fourth verse is, by some interpreters, supposed to be spoken in the name of the church at Ephesus, expressing their entire satisfaction in this point; by others, as a solemn profession of his own veracity made by St. John himself. It is by no means agreeable to my present design to enter into critical disputes, especially where the consequence of determining either way is of no greater account than here it seems to be. Let it suffice to say then, that in either acceptation these two concluding verses offer an argument for the truth of this Gospel consisting of two parts. The one referring to the person that wrote it; the other, to the measure of that which is written. Some little shall be spoken to each of those, and then I have done with the subject of this day.

First, let the person that wrote it be considered. One, who from the beginning of our Lord's ministry had been his inseparable attendant and companion; one, who had all possible advantages of informing himself, not only from those mighty works and divine discourses delivered and done publicly, but from the peculiar favours of a more retired conversation; one, who lay under no necessity of taking up any part of his report at second-hand, and so was liable to none of those misrepresentations, common either to them who study to deceive, or to them who, without design, have often the misfortune to set things in a different light merely by varying of circumstances and expressions; one, who spoke (as his first Epistle was observed to profess) from the consent and agreeing testimony of all his senses; and that in matters of which the senses are proper and competent judges; and, for the rest, too high for these faculties to reach, one, who was assisted and inspired by God himself, chosen and appointed a preacher

and a witness, and proved a faithful witness by numberless miracles, such as nothing less than a Divine Power could perform, such as were performed on purpose to be attestations to the doctrines he taught, and therefore such as leave no room for thinking the doctrines they confirmed false, without the absurdity and blasphemous imputation of making God himself a party in the cheat; one, whose birth and education never qualified him for being skilled in the arts of reasoning, much less for the cunning craftiness of deceiving, least of all for an attempt so daring, an imagination so extravagant, as that of imposing upon a whole world at once; one, who was convinced himself upon the same evidence which he offered to others; and proved the sincerity of his conviction effectually, by abandoning all his worldly interests at an age when men use to be most sanguine and fond of them, and this to follow a Master who made it no secret that he had not where to lay his own head; one, that could not possibly have prospect of better interest in things here on earth than that he left, however mean it were, but exchanged safety and business and unenvied quiet for poverty and persecutions, obloquy and malice, universal opposition and continual toil and danger; one, that could not have been the beloved disciple of *the Truth, the Way, and the Life*, had he swerved from sincerity and truth; and, lastly, one, that no man alive is able to account for the weight and sublimity of his writings, otherwise than from his leaning on that breast *in which were hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge*, being instructed, I mean, from above. This, and much less than this, no sober man excepts against for a sufficient inducement to believe in other matters; but in this, alas! this single affair of religion, men think it prudence to mock their souls with fancied difficulties, and object and cavil themselves out of their salvation. And yet all this, (and let as much be produced, if there can, for any other testimony which is relied upon most firmly,) all this, I say, and more, comes in to give credit and authority to St. John, and it is no overstraining of the point when we apply it all to that character of his Gospel here, *This is the disciple which testifieth of these things, and wrote these things, and we know that his testimony is true.*

2. A second consideration enforcing this argument is the measure of that which is written. St. John, as was said before, proposed, as one end of compiling this Gospel, the supplying us with several important transactions in our Saviour's life, omitted by the other three Evangelists. But, lest his enemies should suspect a favourite disciple to have allowed himself too great a liberty of enlarging upon this occasion, he tells us in the close, that it is not for want of matter his history ends so soon; so far from this, that it is not to be conceived, much less to be told, how many of our Lord's actions are still left unrehearsed. This is the substance of the twenty-fifth verse, *And there are also many other things which Jesus did, the which if they should be written every one, I suppose that even the world itself would not contain the books that should be written.*

An expression which shews, that even the Holy Spirit himself does not disdain those figures which they to whom he condescends to

speak, find themselves obliged to use, for a more lively expression of their thoughts upon lofty subjects and extraordinary occasions: and proves them as bad casuists as orators, who charge with falsehood all those innocent modes of speech which only illustrate and adorn, without any studied intention or natural tendency to deceive.

The substance then of this conclusion is, that there is as much delivered down to us as need be, though not so much as might be. And this acquits the authors of partiality in a case where there was no possibility of exceeding. It was their design to satisfy, but not to oppress us with evidence. Had not the former been done, St. John could not have said, *These things are written that ye might believe*. And when enough was written for that purpose, why should we desire, why should we fondly obtrude that which is not written, for more? It can be no just reflection upon Scripture or its perfection, that all our Lord's miracles are not related, all his discourses not repeated there, since that is truly perfect which is sufficiently fitted for its end. And they who tax the Gospel of such insufficiency will do well to acquaint us what additions to it will suffice. What can those miracles be which would convince, if those which we know already are too weak? what those discourses which would prevail, if such as we read here have not the power to persuade? Men may bear others in hand, and perhaps delude themselves, with a pretence, that if some discoveries were a little clearer, some things expressed more fully and distinctly, some grounds of objection obviated, they would believe as assuredly, and live as strictly, as they who press the necessity of both most, could wish. But all these are vain imaginations, and they know not what they ask. Were all these things just as they now would have, yet even then they would be where they are. The same pride, or favourite lust, or worldly interest, would still produce the same effects. And no words can ever be so plain, but these might draw to an ambiguous sense; no point so clear, where prejudice cannot start fresh doubts. In a word, what Abraham left upon the rich man is, with its necessary variation, true of all mankind, who live under the ministry of the Gospel: *If they believe not the revelations they have already, neither would they believe*, neither would they be contented with, any other they could have: but he that is an infidel would be an infidel still; and he that is unjust and filthy would be unjust and filthy still. *Cleanse therefore your hands, ye wicked, and purify your hearts, ye double-minded; draw nigh unto God, and he will draw nigh to you*; for if any man be seriously disposed to do his will, and stand not in his own light, that man shall not fail to know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether Jesus Christ and his apostles have spoken of themselves.

But as for those who are already persuaded of the truth as it is in Jesus, let them thankfully receive that measure of light which God hath afforded. Let them bless him for the abundant evidence he hath given, for assuring their hearts in the faith of his Son; esteeming it, as it really is, the glory of our religion, that all the excellencies of its Divine Author are too many, too great to bear a particular illustra-

tion. Let them study with diligence the most faithful records of his most holy life, and search for the treasures of wisdom in his heavenly discourses. Let them improve by what they do or may know here in holiness of conversation; and wait with patience and humble hope for the ravishing discovery of that, which is yet unattainable, hereafter. So shall they pay true reverence to the memory of those saints, by whose labours they have been instructed, when they at once dwell upon their books and live by their examples: so be sure to gain the seasonable requests, in which, with a charity large as his whom we commemorate this day, they beseech God *of his mercy so to enlighten his church with the doctrine of this blessed apostle and evangelist St. John,* that every member of it may so walk in the light of his truth, as at length to attain the light of everlasting life, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

THE INNOCENTS' DAY.

THE COLLECT.

O ALMIGHTY GOD, who out of the mouths of babes and sucklings hast ^aordained strength, and madest infants to glorify thee ^bby their deaths; Mortify and kill all vices in us, and so strengthen us by thy grace, that by the ^cinnocency of our lives, and constancy of our faith even unto death, we may glorify thy holy name; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

For the EPISTLE. Rev. xiv. 1.

1 *And I looked, and, lo, a Lamb stood on the mount Sion, and with him an hundred forty and four thousand, having his Father's name written in their foreheads.* 1. Another representation I had of Christ (the Lamb of God) standing in his Church, and all his faithful servants, who stuck to the profession and practice of the truth with him.

2 *And I heard a voice from heaven, as the voice of many waters, and as the voice of a great thunder: and I heard the voice of harpers harping with their harps:* 2. At the same time I heard a mixed noise, exceeding loud, and yet melodious too, denoting the multitude of these faithful Christians, the praises and acclamations and the joy that are among them in heaven.

3 *And they sung as it were a new song before the throne, and before the four beasts,* 3. Such is the glorious state of the church triumph-

and the elders : and no man could learn that song but the hundred and forty and four thousand, which were redeemed from the earth.

where the martyrs and saints sing their and good providence in their sufferings none are capable of bearing a part in but

4 *These are they which were not defiled with women ; for they are virgins. These are they which follow the Lamb whithersoever he goeth. These were redeemed from among men, being the firstfruits unto God and to the Lamb.*

rescued from the corruptions of the age presented as an offering, the choice, the early product of the field (like the first fruits heretofore) to God and Christ.

5 *And in their mouth was found no guile : for they are without fault before the throne of God.*

under the law, in which no blemish was found.

ant, where God sits in majesty, surrounded with the spirits of apostles and other holy rulers of his Church, thanks to God for his grace for Christ. Thanks, which the steadfast pure believers.

4. And these are such as preserved themselves from the pollutions of idolatry and uncleanness ; kept close to Christ, and declined no danger he led them to ; were

they lived in, sanctified and presented as an offering, the choice, the early product of the field

5. A sacrifice acceptable to God for their constancy and sincerity, like those

COMMENT.

ST. JOHN, in the chapter next before, describes a vision, representing a very severe persecution of the Christian church^d ; such as endeavoured, by all manner of hardships, to draw men over to idolatry, and deprive those of life and civil liberties, who refused to submit to the wicked decrees imposed on them to this purpose. And here he proceeds to set before us the constancy and happy condition of those who continued steadfast in their principles, notwithstanding all such discouragements to the contrary. Without entering therefore into any particular inquiry what distinct events this portion of Scripture was more especially calculated for, it shall be my care rather to improve it, by considering, in general, the case of those who live and die in the undaunted confession of the truth. And that shall be done under two heads. The one consisting of the virtues and qualifications that these saints and martyrs are said to be conspicuous for : the other, of the circumstances of that blissful state into which they are received as a reward for those virtues.

I. I begin with the virtues and qualifications, for which these saints and martyrs are said to be conspicuous ; according to that view of them presented to us in the fourth and fifth verses.

1. The first of these is, that *they were not defiled with women, for they are virgins*. From whence, what advantage soever the patrons and advocates of a single life, voluntary and vowed upon a religious account, may fancy to themselves, it is manifest they overstrain the point, when casting reflections upon that state of life which the Scrip-

^d Chap. xiii. 15, 16, 17.

tures have expressly pronounced *honourable*; and when they suppose all those approaches to pollute any sort or order of men, which the apostle hath abundantly vindicated by styling them the *bed undefiled*. From hence alone it would follow evidently enough, that by the persons *not defiled with women*, must be meant here (if those words are to be literally understood) men, who never allowed themselves in any unlawful liberties of this kind, but, by mortifying their carnal inclinations and appetites, did, as St. Paul expresses himself upon a like occasion, *possess their vessel in sanctification and honour*; whether by never tasting such pleasure at all, or by marrying, and such a behaviour in that state as thus also *to keep themselves pure and undefiled members of Christ's body*.

This, I say, must in all reason be the signification of the place, if taken literally. But very judicious interpreters have rather inclined to a figurative importance of the words. Nothing is more usual in the Old Testament than to reproach the revolt of God's people to idolatry in the terms of *committing adultery and fornication against him, going a whoring after false gods*, and the like. Nor is this style peculiar to the Old, but St. Paul, expressing his fear and great concern lest the Corinthians should have been seduced by false teachers, does it by an allusion exactly the same. *I am jealous over you with a godly jealousy, for I have espoused you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ. But I fear, lest by any means, as the serpent beguiled Eve through his subtlety, so your minds should be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ*. Accordingly we find the Church called the *Spouse*, and our Lord the bridegroom, and the spiritual unity between these two represented by marriage. All which metaphors do plainly proceed upon the unalienable right he hath to our worship and our affections; and tend to prove, that the estranging the one or the other from him is an act of the highest and most irreparable injustice, a violation of the most solemn, most sacred tie in the world.

In agreement with this manner of speaking, so reasonable in itself, so familiar to both Testaments, we may very well understand those persons to be intended here, who had withstood all the allurements and solicitations to apostasy, and with the strictest fidelity adhered to their rightful Lord. The rather, because the persecution now referred to came from the hand of a heathen emperor; and the instances in which their compliance was required were those of doing honour to idols, by sacrifice, or incense, or some other external mark of adoration. The rather still, because not only their heathen persecutors, but their false complying brethren, the heretics of those times, indulged themselves in the vilest sensuality. And therefore, in opposition to those abominable bestialities, it might be yet more proper to express the immovable perseverance of these faithful by terms of the strictest chastity, and a freedom from all carnal pollutions. And thus, I take

^a Heb. xiii. 4.

^f Exod. xxiv. 15; Judg. ii. 17, viii. 33; Psal. cvi. 39; Jerem. iii. 9; Ezek. xvi. 29-37.

^g 2 Cor. xi. 2, 3.

^h Rev. xix. 7; Math. ix. 15; John iii. 29; Ephes. v. 31.

it, we have a rational construction of those words applied to uncleanness and fornication in a figurative and spiritual sense, *These are they which were not defiled with women, for they are virgins.*

This use however we not only may but most certainly ought to make of the Holy Spirit's choosing to speak after this manner; that it is to very little purpose for men to pretend conscience, and zeal, and suffering for religion, unless to the soundness of their principles they be careful to add purity of conversation. When therefore people of vicious lives expose themselves to hardships for the sake of opinions never so well established, and in points never so essential, do they not minister just cause of suspicion that this is rather the effect of prejudice or education, of humour or interest, than of conscience and religion? it is sure, no man ought to give up what his conscience tells him he ought to abide by in point of doctrine; but is it not as sure that he ought not to indulge any thing forbidden in point of practice; nay, is not this latter obligation so much stronger, as the matters of practice are clearer and less liable to dispute or mistake than most points of doctrine? it is certainly *good to be zealously affected in a good thing*, but a zeal that is sincere will be so always, and in every good thing. And if this be not the case, a man is *zealously affected, but not well*. In short, conscience is a uniform rule, extending to every part of our duty; and religion commands doing as well as suffering: so that there is but one way of doing true honour to this cause, and therefore, if we would die martyrs, we must live saints.

2. The second character of these faithful is, that *they follow the Lamb whithersoever he goeth*. Which, though we might extend to an imitation of Christ in all those graces and virtues of which he hath set us a pattern; yet, since the *following him* is a phrase so often joined with *taking up the cross*, and in regard the persons here spoken of are such as did in this sense follow him; it seems most reasonable to understand the words, of declining no trials that the providence of God thought fit to call them to. And thus they are distinguished from those forward men, who, like the *seed in stony ground*, put forth apace, and promise mighty matters by the hasty efforts of their eager zeal, but when *the heat of tribulation ariseth, wither away*. These, like the good ground, on the other hand, have root and depth of earth; they have considered and prepared their minds; they suffer upon a principle, and this enables them to bring forth fruit with patience. And the reason why such alone is good ground is, because, as God hath a right to the whole of us, so he declares he will not endure any rival, any reserve. And therefore, how difficult soever it may seem, or, upon making the experiment, may prove, yet is it certainly a just and equitable condition which our Saviour hath propounded, that *whosoever does not* (in comparison of him) *hate his father and mother and wife and children and brethren and sisters, yea and his own life also, he cannot be his disciple: and whosoever doth not bear his cross, and come after him, cannot be his disciple*. The reason is, because,

¹ Gal. iv. 18.

² Matth. xiii. 21.

³ Luke xiv. 26, 27.

from the instant of devoting ourselves to his service, we cease to be at our own disposal any longer. Not that this act of ours conveys a new right, but it acknowledges and makes that our choice which by creation and redemption was doubly vested in him before. And to say after this, so far we will go in our obedience, and no farther; to quit our post when even in the hottest of the battle; to be anxious for our possessions or our dependencies, or even our persons, when called into the field; all this, St. Paul tells his son Timothy, is absurd, and quite beside our character. *Thou therefore (says he) endure hardness as a good soldier of Jesus Christ. No man that warreth entangleth himself with the affairs of this life, that he may please him who hath chosen him to be a soldier.*

But, besides the great deal that might be urged from the propriety and absolute dominion of God, the much more from the wisdom of the thing, with respect to the recompence we shall be sure to receive; this, methinks, should admit of no debate, whether we ought not to follow where the Lamb leads. Which is in effect to doubt whether any instance of our love ought to be thought too much for him who hath given such costly proofs of his love to us; whether we shall be content to suffer upon command for our own infinite advantage, and to prevent much worse sufferings in case of disobedience; when he who left us the example did it voluntarily, for the unspeakable benefit of us, not to acquire any addition of happiness, not to prevent any inconvenience to himself: in short, whether we shall be content to endure unspeakably less than he, to do what, if we depend upon him, he will render us able to do, in order to being afterwards as happy with him as it is possible for men to be; who yet without him never can be, never could have been happy at all.

I have offered but a very little part of what this consideration might suggest, but I hope at least enough to make all, who judge impartially, sensible, that they who follow the Lamb to prison, to death, whithersoever he goeth, act as becomes men of reason and religion. Let me add only upon this particular, that when men are thus convinced, and called upon, and obey that call heartily, it is necessary they remember that a Lamb is the leader they profess to follow. One called so, not only because a most precious sacrifice, a true passover, but because, *as a lamb before his shearers is dumb, so he was led to the slaughter and opened not his mouth.* Courage indeed in suffering for a good cause is well; but if this be not tempered with meekness, if our resentments burn in our breasts and boil over in undutiful behaviour, projects of mischief and revenge, opprobrious language, or any sort of indecent bitterness, the gracefulness at least of all such suffering is lost; and neither we nor our cause are like to get by it. And therefore, among other methods proposed by St. Peter for establishing the credit of Christianity among its adversaries, he seems to be principally concerned for the manner of their suffering. He propounds Christ as a pattern in this

respect especially of *doing well*, and even when they suffered for that, *taking it patiently*; for *herewunto*, says he, *"were ye called, for Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example that ye should follow his steps, who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth: who, when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not; but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously, &c."*

By comparing which exhortation with St. John's account of the martyrs in this chapter, it is easy to discern that this dovelike simplicity and innocence, this gentle and resigned submission to the divine will, this modest, even when stoutest, resistance unto blood, is necessary to render them the persons described at the fifth verse, in whose mouth was found no guile, for they are without fault before the throne of God. The latter of these expressions, I make no doubt, alludes to that law among the Jews which ordered a strict search into all the creatures brought for sacrifice, and forbade the offering in which there was any defect or superfluity, or notable blemish. Hence it is we find our blessed Lord termed the *Lamb without spot*, and here the saints are said to be without fault, because no *guile was found in their mouth*, that is, by reason of their undesigning sincerity, and the uncorrupted probity of their minds. Which, as it speaks their truth and honesty in general, so may it possibly have peculiar reference to a fraudulent method too often and too scandalously used in times of persecution, whereby men delivered themselves from torture and public shame. Some did, by private notes to the magistrate, falsely signify that they had sacrificed to idols; and others, who durst not go thus far, yet bought certificates underhand of their having done so. And so, for the saving a loss or personal danger, were content to bear the infamy and give the scandal of a crime they never committed. Such tickets a learned man hath thought no improbable sense of having the mark or name of the beast; and the not submitting to any mean subterfuges, but daring to appear what men are and ought to be, is certainly one instance of a heart without guile, necessary in the day of trial.

3. There remains yet one part more of these martyrs' character to be considered, in those words, *These were redeemed from among men, being the first fruits unto God and to the Lamb*. By being *redeemed from among men*, we are to understand that they were delivered from the common corruptions of the world, supported under temptations by which others were subdued, and kept by the grace and power of God unto salvation. All which are privileges, owing to the merits and efficacy of Christ's blood delivering from the bondage of sin, and ransoming those who had otherwise continued captives and slaves to the tyrannical enemy of souls, into the *glorious liberty of the sons of God*. So that the proofs they gave of their fervent love and unshaken obedience are not an act entirely their own, but to be ascribed to an unseen and supernatural assistance, to the Spirit of God strengthening their weakness, confirming their resolution, and producing that

perseverance which flesh and blood, alone and left to itself, is not now in a condition of attaining.

And these again are called the *first fruits* to God, in allusion to the custom of offering *the first and the best of the crop*, as an acknowledgment due to the Giver of all good gifts, and an expedient instituted to sanctify the rest of the field. In the former sense, as the first, we are to look upon these persons as our leaders, placed in the forefront of the battle, such as have borne the hottest of the engagement and were exposed to the fury of the enemy; not only to gain themselves promotion by this post of honour, but to quicken and provoke those that come after by their example, and to upbraid our cowardice if we shall faint and act feebly in this warfare, after they have so bravely stood the shock and broken the force of the enemy that comes against us.

As the first fruits again import the best of the field, so are we to regard them as persons particularly favoured by God and the Lamb. For though the death of all his saints be precious, even of those who live and die in peace; yet we cannot but see good reason why some preference should be given to that death which is voluntary and chosen, violent and attended with infinite torture and pain, above that which is natural and necessary, and hath no agonies but such as the parting of soul and body renders common to all mankind. There is a manifest difference between dying *in the faith*, and dying *for it*; between not falling from our integrity at our last hour, and being content to anticipate that hour by sacrificing a life at our choice to preserve, in defence and for the sake of truth and a good conscience. All the *righteous*, we are assured, *shall shine in the kingdom of their father*, but not all with equal lustre. For that justice which *rewards men according to their works* is not more concerned to crown every one that *strives lawfully*, than it is to see that those who undergo sharper conflicts, and have borne a heavier cross, be as much distinguished in the measures of their recompence, and adorned with a proportionably more massive and brighter crown.

II. And this leads me to say somewhat of my other general head; the circumstances of that blissful state in which these martyrs are described here, as a reward for their virtues and past sufferings.

The first of these is, being with *the Lamb upon mount Sion*, that is, *the heavenly Jerusalem*; of which that on earth, where the temple of God stood, and the marks of his especial presence were exhibited, is in sundry places of this and other books in the New Testament said to have been a figure. And yet, though but a figure, what glorious things do we find spoken of it in Scripture! what devout raptures of joy in the holy Psalmist, when at liberty to approach it! what tender complaints, what moving lamentations, when debarred of this most valuable privilege! But if the shadow could deserve such honour, how ought we to be affected with the substance! If the sensible and symbolical representations only were so magnificent,

^p Levit. xliii.

^q Matt. xliii. 43.

^r Rev. xiv. 1; Gal. iv. 26; Hebr. xii. 22; Rev. iii. 12; xxi. 2, 10.

what must the lustre of that presence be, when this veil of flesh and sense shall be done away, and we admitted to see God as he is! to be with him whom our souls love, with him who loved our souls so dearly as to be born, to be afflicted, to bleed, to die for them; to be with him for ever, to enjoy him in a league of inviolable, everlasting friendship in the mansions he is gone before to prepare for us; to partake in his glories, as we have taken part in his sufferings, and to feel our own glories advanced then in proportion as our sufferings are multiplied here! No dangers, no fatigues are esteemed insupportable by the men of this world for the raising a fortune, for gaining the renown of valour and faithful service to a prince, who is thought to pay them well, with a gracious look sometimes, with a title of honour, and a small revenue to their family. But what, alas! are these, in comparison of the constant favour and presence, the intimate and unalterable affection of the King of kings, the being distinguished in the court of heaven, let into a share of all our Master's glory, nay, let into a share even of his royalties themselves! This is what the highest favourite, the worthiest patriot must not have the vanity to hope for from the most gracious monarch upon earth; and yet this is the condescension of our heavenly Lord, this the honour and partnership to which saints and martyrs have a title. For these he is said to make *kings and priests*, and to all such is promised for their encouragement, that *if they die with him, they shall also live with him, if they suffer with him, they shall also reign with him*. Nor is the pleasure flowing from these promotions, like that from those here below, the less for being thus communicated. Quite otherwise I take a

2. Second circumstance of the bliss described in this chapter, to result from the numbers to whom it is imparted. Great part of the satisfaction taken in the blessing of this world depends upon comparison. Few would esteem themselves happy in the enjoyment, did not this make a difference between their own and the case of others that want them. Nor is this altogether, though too much, from narrowness of spirit, but in great measure from the straitness and insufficiency of the things themselves. But now, the blessings of our future state being boundless, and such as can never be exhausted; as these qualities leave no room for envy and emulation, so neither will glorified souls retain any disposition to them. Every other's happiness will then be an addition to each man's personal happiness; and especially the honour of our God and Saviour, and the conquests and successes his blood hath obtained; which the more the redeemed and glorified are, the greater and more wonderful they are. And therefore it had taken from this bliss, and represented it much less, to have said, that one, or a few, than that a *hundred and forty four thousand* of these saints were all together with the Lamb on mount Sion. And the apostle to the Hebrews hath therefore added, that we shall then *come to an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly and church of the firstborn, which are written in heaven, and to God the*

Judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect, and to Jesus the Mediator of the new covenant.

Imagine with yourselves two friends, dear as their own souls to each other; these both engaged in enterprises of the utmost difficulty, in distant parts of the world; each exercised with dangers and hardships for the service of his country; and, with a vast expense of blood and toil, succeeding so well, that no marks of honour are thought too much for them. Imagine these two friends, after long absence, thus laden with conquest and adorned with laurels, meeting and finding each other just as they could wish: what joyful welcomes, what mutual rejoicings, what reciprocal fruition of their past labours and present triumphs must such an interview create! And when you have carried this image as high as you can go, and multiplied it to ten thousand times as much, by supposing ten thousand such cases; know that such, and much more than this, are the mutual gratulations of the blessed in heaven. As much more, as their sufferings have been sharper; as much more, as the cause in which they suffered is nobler; as much more, as the enemies they have vanquished are stronger; as much more, as the reward for their service is more bountiful, more lasting, more unenvied; in a word, as much more, as these mystical members of Christ's body are united with a more entire and disinterested affection, and consequently more transported with the gallant actions and successes and glories of each other, than it is possible for the sincerest and most generous friends on earth to be. And this love, this unanimity it is, that qualifies them to join in that which I would observe from the third verse, as another circumstance of their felicity:

3. The singing together consorts of praise to God and the Lamb. For that such is the subject of their song, *we may learn from several like passages of this book. And this must needs be an eternal subject. For if even we, who see things very darkly, might yet, with very little application, find matter more than enough to employ the whole of our lives in holy thanks and wonder; how plentifully must they be furnished, who are placed in a nearer and more distinct view of the essential excellencies and marvellous works of God! How delightful must their contemplation be of the majesty and power, the wisdom and the goodness, the holiness and the justice of God! How pleasing the reflections of these, which are cast upon their minds; from the glass of the creation, the nicest and most beauteous parts whereof are at present hid from our sight; from the dispositions of providence, and those secret overrulings of events, which make *all things work together for good to them that love God*; from the mysteries of our redemption, and *that love of Christ which passeth knowledge*; and, not to mention more, from their own past labours and sufferings, and that condescension which counted them worthy to *endure reproach for the sake of Christ*, permitted their blood to be shed in so glorious a cause, and made them so ample a compensation for every drop they

spilt, for every tear they shed, for every torture they felt, for every dying agony they so magnanimously sustained. Who can see, and feel, and meditate on these things in silence? Who can speak of them in any language, but that of praise? And who that hath begun to praise can ever desist again? But withal, since this song of praise, it is expressly said, could not be learnt by any but such saints, who would think any cost too much to purchase a part in such felicity? Who *count even his life dear to him, so that he might finish his course with such joy as this?* And therefore it is, that those joys are revealed, that they may excite in us a becoming zeal and fervent desire; the same, that men of like passions and like good sense at least with ourselves have been fired with, and found their account in: the same that will add to our reproach and condemnation, if we resolve to perish slothfully and ingloriously, and will neither be attracted to virtue by such prospects, nor shamed into courage by such examples.

These are some of the many considerations offering themselves, from the account now before us, concerning the martyrs in general. Which the Church hath propounded to our meditations this day, as containing some things not improperly applicable to those infants in particular, whose barbarous murder by Herod was made instrumental to the glory of him for whom they died. For they, in the most literal sense, *were not defiled with sensual pleasures, who left the world in virgin innocence.* They were most truly *redeemed from among men*, whose early translation to a state of bliss and security prevented the hazards and temptations of a corrupt age. They were, strictly speaking, *the first fruits unto God and the Lamb*, who began to shed their blood in the cause of a new-born Saviour, and were the first fruits of the martyrs themselves. By this earliest experiment of cruelty against his blessed Son it pleased God to demonstrate how vain all future attempts of his enemies should be, whose implacable and bloody malice laboured to destroy this hated King of the Jews, either in his person or his members; and that such wicked designs should have no other issue than those of this day. Disappointment and vengeance to the inhuman contrivers, happiness and reward to the innocent sufferers, and increase of honour to the person in whose cause they suffered. Thus Herod shortly after lived and died a remarkable monument of the divine justice, and perished by a complication of plagues, as amazing as the unparalleled crimes that drew them down upon him. Thus these tender plants, cut off in the bud, sprung up again and flourished, and bore such fruits as their circumstances were capable of, the confession of their blood, though not of their tongues; by which they and their memory are blessed. And thus the blessed Jesus, after sojourning in a strange country, returned to enlighten his own with that doctrine which, from the very first setting out of its author into the world, was manured with blood, grew under persecutions, and by the fate attending it proved, that to

die in its defence was not to lose a life, but to save it, to make the quickest and the surest passage from death unto life; from a life in the midst of which we are in death to a life which is so indeed, life immortal and full of glory. To which God of his infinite mercy bring us, for the sake of his dear Son and our only Redeemer, Christ Jesus. Amen.

THE GOSPEL. St. Matth. ii. 13.

13 *The angel of the Lord appeareth to Joseph in a dream, saying, Arise, and take the young child and his mother, and flee into Egypt, and be thou there until I bring thee word: for Herod will seek the young child to destroy him.*

Joseph timely warning of it by the message of an angel, and directed him what course to take for preserving the child and his mother.

14 *When he arose, he took the young child and his mother by night, and departed into Egypt:*

night to conceal his motions, went away with Jesus and the virgin:

15 *And was there until the death of Herod: that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet, saying, Out of Egypt have I called my son.*

By this method the divine providence accomplished a prophecy of Hosea, which (had not only a retrospect upon what had passed upon Israel, but) looked forward also upon him of whom Israel, when spoken of as the servant or child of God, is more than once set as a type, even the Messiah.

16 *Then Herod, when he saw that he was mocked of the wise men, was exceeding wroth, and sent forth, and slew all the children that were in Bethlehem, and in all the coasts thereof, from two years old and under, according to the time which he had diligently enquired of the wise men.*

destroying him, which he thought could not miss. And that was, to murder all the children in and about the place where it was agreed Christ must have been born; and of or about that age, which (by computation of the time when his star denoted that birth) Christ must have been of.

17 *Then was fulfilled that which was spoken by Jeremy the prophet, saying,*

18 *In Rama was there a voice heard, lamentation, and weeping, and great mourning, Rachel weeping for her children, and would not be comforted, because they are not.*

13. Almighty God foreseeing the wicked design of Herod against Christ, and the cruel effects of his disappointment of intelligence from the wise men, gave

14. This message Joseph readily complied with, and taking the advantage of the

15. And dwelt in Egypt till Herod died, and he received fresh orders, as the angel had promised he should, for returning back

16. Meanwhile Herod, impatient of the affront and disappointment sustained by the wise men not informing him where this child was to be found, resolved to take a course for destroying him, which he thought could not miss. And that was, to murder all the children in and about the place where it was agreed Christ must have been born; and of or about that age, which (by computation of the time when his star denoted that birth) Christ must have been of.

17, 18. The general grief upon which occasion was a most eminent completion of that prophecy in Jeremiah, which represents Rachel the mother of Joseph and Benjamin, (and consequently a

proper mourner for the captivity of the ten tribes signified by Ephraim, and for this calamity too, since Benjamin and Judah's posterity, the two other tribes, were promiscuously concerned, and dwelt by one another) inconsolably bewailing the loss and death of her children. And for such sorrow of afflicted mothers there could never be a more melancholy cause than the barbarity of Herod gave by this general and bloody slaughter.

COMMENT.

THE historical account of this passage is so plain, that almost the only as well as the most profitable thing I have to do will be to improve it by some moral reflections. To which purpose I shall observe what were the wicked incentives to this barbarous injustice, how these came to prevail, the circumstances of them who suffered, and the unsuccessfulness of this bloody act, to the end hoped and intended to have been accomplished by it.

First then. We have in Herod a very lively instance of envy and ambition. The ground of his uneasiness was the news of one born *king of the Jews*, and the danger that birth seemed to threaten to his own and his family's pretensions to the government. And it may be worth our while to take notice by what vile and indirect methods he laboured to prevent the supposed ill consequences of this memorable event.

Herod, no doubt, was full of that mistaken notion of the Messiah's coming (then daily expected) that it should be in outward pomp and splendour, and the excellency of a kingdom, consisting in victories and triumphs and worldly dominion. And therefore, to cut this short at once, he descends to the basest hypocrisy, and professes a desire of doing homage to this glorious young prince. But, finding that project of dissembled respect defeated, he enters upon another, of sacrificing to his jealousy a great number of young children. And, if some who have treated of this matter say true, he had the unnatural barbarity to take off a son of his own amongst the rest.

Now, what a warning should such an example as this be, to every man that sees or hears of it, to keep a strait hand over those desires of honour and greatness which are so natural to mankind, so very pleasing when gratified, but withal so full of jealousy and torment, so very apt to break through all the obligations of nature and duty when indulged beyond due measure! And indulged beyond due measure they certainly are when not restrained by this principle, of not allowing ourselves in any thing unlawful, unsincere, or unbecoming, for the giving them satisfaction. How wretched a contradiction are those people to themselves, who, in their too warm and eager pursuits after honour, stick at no means, though never so dishonourable; and so prostitute the very thing they profess to court! How heinous an injury is it to an inclination which seems to have been interwoven with our original constitution, on purpose for a spur to useful, noble, and uncommon undertakings, when, instead of being

excited by it to actions laudable and good, they debase it to the most mischievous designs, compass their ends by perfidiousness, injustice, inhumanity, overturn all laws, and erase the best and brightest impressions of reason and religion upon their minds! It is as lamentable as it is amazing to consider, to what exorbitant villainies men of unbounded ambition have, without the least appearance of remorse, been abandoned, to arrive at greatness, or to establish themselves in it. What liberties and rights, what lives, what nations and states have fallen a prey to this aspiring evil! How power hath been made the only measure and rule, nothing boggled at, nothing omitted which this was able to compass!

And yet, as many tragical instances as history furnishes of this kind, as just a detestation as every considerate reader conceives against them, it is but too sad a truth, that the same cause produces the same effects every day still. It does so even among those who call themselves Christians, professors of a religion whose fundamental principles and peculiar temper are humility and meekness and contempt of the world; a religion, which labours above all things to persuade us, that not crowns and sceptres, not universal empire, not the whole world and all the glories of it, are worth the doing any one thing to attain or to secure them which may wound our consciences or injure any man breathing; and that the true way to be exalted indeed is to abase and to deny ourselves, to mortify our vanity, and to seek that honour which cometh from God only.

And it may be one considerable help toward doing so, to reflect very seriously upon the horror of such examples as this now before us; that by the deserved odium and great enormity of wretches so transported by the overbearing force of this furious passion, we may arm ourselves in time, and oppose against the violence of so strong a torrent the engagements of justice and charity, moderation and humanity, and a steady virtue. For though all these are little enough when the eagerness of ambition is pushing us forward, yet they will be of great use to cool and keep down such heat, if we look beforehand what precipices this passion will certainly run us upon when it grows headstrong and gets the rein in its teeth. And, however our judgment may be blinded then, yet to them who see the evil and danger of this action here, even Herod's crown cannot but seem a purchase much too dear, at the expense of so much innocent blood, and the never to be forgotten guilt and infamy of shedding it.

II. Secondly; the instance now in hand may be of excellent use to prevent or correct the wild excesses of immoderate anger. The text tells us that *Herod was exceeding wroth*, and the pretended ground for this resentment was, that he thought himself *mocked by the wise men*. But supposing them guilty of neglect in not returning with an account where this young king was to be found, yet what provocation had these poor infants given, that such a slight should he so severely revenged upon them? How had so many tender mothers deserved to

be made childless? How the coats of Bethlehem to be drowned in blood and tears, only because God had given that place the honour of bringing into the world the joy and desire of all nations, and then had defeated the treachery and malice of a tyrant, wicked enough to endeavour the disappointing all nations of that desire and joy? But, alas! when we argue thus, it is to be supposed we address to men in their senses, in a condition to be treated with; and not to those who have lost all consideration, and are past the power of persuasion. For such in truth are all men transported with passion and inflamed with resentment. Rage then hath got the upper hand of reason; all regard to equity is lost. The nature of the crime; the degree of the punishment due for it; or indeed, whether any be due; or if there be, who are the persons on whom it ought to fall; are deliberations entirely set aside. This wild beast once let loose, falls upon every thing that comes in its way, devours without distinction, and in its thirst for blood knows no measure. And therefore, among the many other forcible arguments for the governing our passion, this ought by no means to be neglected; that men in their fury banish all pity, all humanity; that neither justice nor innocence nor sex nor age can stand before it. And surely nothing ought more to weigh with us, for being upon our guard against all that is apt to ruffle us, than the almost irresistible temptation, which men who have lost their temper lie under, to act in their heats such unjust, such brutish things, as all in their right minds scorn and detest them for; such as themselves, when looking back upon them in cold blood, feel they are never able, either to repair the wrong of by any after compensation, or to wash away the guilt and shame of, but by the tears of a most afflicting remorse.

III. Hence we may take occasion, in the third place, to observe the miserable condition of those hardened wretches, whom Almighty God suffers to fall from one degree of wickedness to another, till at last they become ripe for destruction, and visible monuments of the divine vengeance. And such was Herod here. For the true understanding of whose case, and the righteousness of God's dispensation toward him, it may not be amiss to view the several circumstances mentioned in this chapter, and to show from thence wherein his guilt and the hardening of his heart consisted.

Now Herod is here represented as a person in great power, king of Judæa; the coming of the wise men from another country, the resolution of the chief priests assembled at Jerusalem, concerning the place determined for the Messiah's birth; the general expectation of it about that time; the wise men inferring it already past, and signified by the star which had conducted them thither; these were all passages very awakening to him. Those wise men disobeying his command of bringing back notice where that child was to be found, wrought, we see, very strongly upon his mind. And the consequence makes it manifest what designs he cherished from the very first; and that his dissembled inclination to worship this wonderful infant was only a contrivance, thereby to gain an opportunity of destroying him.

But now, had all these things been considered, interest and passion and prejudice apart; was it not very natural to suppose that the appearance of an extraordinary star, the zeal of those travellers, the concurrent testimony of the Jewish doctors, should have suggested that providence had a more than common concern in all this matter? Ought it not in reason to have been presumed that the wise men, who disappointed his expectations, and yet lay under no viable temptation to disobey him, had met with some such overruling direction, which diverted them another way in their return home, as they had found before in their journey thither? And was it not a very obvious conclusion from all this, that God had discovered his hypocrisy, and set himself against his wicked intentions; and that therefore it were fitter for him to repent of the past, than to engage in any new attempts, so impossible to be concealed, so unlikely to prosper? These inferences, I say, might much more reasonably have been deduced from what had passed in the whole course of this affair, than any of those to which Herod converted it. So that upon the whole, providence did not by these events fix or unavoidably ordain the effects of them, but left them free to be applied to good or ill purposes. Nay, they were rather applicable to good than evil; but still capable of either, according to the will and disposition of the party concerned to make his use of them.

Now it is farther to be considered, that, although our corrupt nature have a most unhappy tendency to evil; yet, to those who will incline to it, there is always at hand a principle above nature correcting that propension, and drawing them to good. And this I conceive not only to be imparted to very good men, but in some convenient measure to all that are not very bad men. The force of this, like that other principle it works against, is strengthened by compliance and custom. And as the corruption of our nature will not hurt us, except we indulge and inflame it; so neither will the influence of grace forsake us, except we resist and quench it. Herein, it is true, is a mighty difference; that our corruption is born with us, but grace is given us freely; and therefore grace must be liable to such conditions for its continuance and increase, as the infinitely wise and good Giver thinks fit to suspend it upon. But, since the benefit of the receiver is what he chiefly aims at; we may depend upon it, that the same kindness which prevailed for the giving will equally prevail for continuing the gift, so long as it is thankfully received and duly improved. On the other hand, if this bounty be repaid with ingratitude and contempt; we are not to wonder that the Giver does not so far contribute to his own dishonour, as the not withdrawing the slightest instances of his love, and seeming to contend in vain with insolent and insensible wretches must needs do.

Now we must not suppose God moved by such partial and unaccountable tenderness, in distinguishing men by his favour, as we ourselves are. He always gives and takes away with reason. Those whom he once loves, he loves unto the end, provided they be careful to continue in his love. He must do so, because, supposing no such provocation as

should alter his affection, the same ground of loving them still remains. And he, as I said, proceeds not upon passion and humour, which have their ebbings and flowings, but upon equity and reason, which are a measure certain and steady and lasting. And thus much, I think, may serve to convince us, that they who lose the grace of God finally, lose it by their own fault.

But still it would be known, what it is to lose the grace of God, with regard to the case before us. And in order hereunto, let us observe, that the grace I am now speaking of is a secret operation of the Spirit of God upon the hearts of men; which, by a wonderful but gentle and secret concurrence with their own wills and faculties, gives a new turn to their thoughts; disposes them to attend to and see the reasonableness of their duty; represents the arguments for doing well in their true light; and gives those arguments such a happy and powerful influence upon the affections, as brings these into obedience to the governing part of the mind. And all this is directly opposite to that depravity of nature which tempts men to be heady and unpersuadable, to overlook and lessen the motives to virtue, and lean eternally to the side of sense and rebellious appetite.

When therefore we are told of *men's hardening their hearts in sin*, the meaning is, that they have so frequently and so long given way to their vicious inclinations, and turned the deaf ear to the better motions of God's Spirit, that its checks and admonitions do no longer make any impression upon their minds. And when we are told that *God hardens men's hearts*, this is not so to be understood as if he did infuse any new and positive disposition to do wickedly; but only, that he withdraws those assistances which they, by obstinate and customary sinning, have rendered ineffectual to their reformation; and so leaves off thus to check or admonish them at all. Then their own vicious inclinations and the temptations of the devil are in their full force; and this ceasing to oppose the powers of his grace against these, seems to be all that the Scripture intends by hardening them who had first hardened themselves.

And what injustice, what hardship can we charge such a proceeding with, which upon the matter amounts to no more than, after many trials and tenders of kindness, to desist from persuading and urging and striving with wretches who will not suffer themselves to be persuaded and overcome to their own advantage? This is not tempting nor compelling men to sin, but giving them over to their own perverse choice, and permitting that evil which in such circumstances does not appear possible to be prevented without breaking in upon the original constitution of rational agents, and forcing us to be good whether we will or no.

Meanwhile the miserable state of such abandoned sinners is very manifest by that restraint being taken off which alone can preserve them from ruin. For nothing more is necessary to their certain undoing than to expose them to the assaults of their spiritual adversary, naked and destitute of proper helps and defence. In such cases, our wills take part with the enemy, and the bias upon them is so

strong, that there is no crime so black into which we are not capable of being drawn. Every dispensation of Providence is then taken by the wrong handle; conscience is silenced, reason darkened, its first and brightest impressions defaced, and even good nature and common humanity outgrown and worn away. Thus Herod, when under the power of anger and jealousy and envy, turned all the warnings and extraordinary notices of the Messiah into fresh incentives to treachery and cruelty; made use of his authority to gratify his revenge, and committed a murder upon multitudes of infants, which one would very hardly suppose it possible for a prince, a father, or indeed any manner of man, to be guilty of.

And yet, whatever horror we conceive, (and sure the utmost we can conceive is no more than just to such unrelenting barbarity,) even Herod in his blackest colours is no other than the true image of every abandoned sinner. For each of us, when not enlightened, assisted, restrained by the grace of God, is liable to be as utterly lost to every sort of good disposition, to be as vehemently bent upon the most detestable wickedness, as this raging prince in the full career of his fury. So very slippery is our standing, unless we take good heed to be guided by that unseen arm that supports us; so very wretched are we all, when forsaken of God and left to ourselves; such remorseless Herods, when at the mercy of the tempter, and in the hand of our own ungoverned passions. But,

IV. Fourthly. Some have objected against the massacre of so many harmless babes upon Christ's account, that it was a mighty hardship, and reflects upon the justice and goodness of the divine Providence. So that I cannot think the subject of this day spoken to as it ought, till some endeavour have been used to clear this difficulty. In order whereunto, let it be remembered, that from what was discoursed under the last particular it manifestly follows, that God is no farther concerned in this or any other crimes than barely as he permits the commission of them. And if, as was there argued, it be no imputation upon his justice and goodness, to suffer men in the sin of designing and acting the worst, the basest, the cruellest villainies; then the next and only remaining enquiry will be, whether the providence of God be concerned to hinder the calamity; that is, whether it be any reasonable reflexion upon the wisdom, the justice, the goodness of God, who can forbid and defeat them, to suffer such designs to take effect upon the innocent, marked out to be oppressed or cut off by them.

Now here a mighty difference must be made between men's suffering unjustly, with regard to men who are the next actors and instruments, and with regard to God, who is the remote cause of those events to them. Men may afflict, crush, and murder those who have given them no provocation, and whom they have no manner of right to treat as they do. But God hath an universal and unlimited dominion over us as creatures; and we have strengthened that title yet more, by forfeiting our lives, and all the comforts of them, as sinners. Consequently, how unjust soever any of our sufferings may

be in respect of men, who are the immediate inflictors, yet in respect of God, of whose deserved vengeance men are the executioners, the extremest sufferings of the very best people never are, never can be unjust.

But this is not all. For we are to consider the present life, not as our last and final state of being, but looking forward and leading on to another. Nor were we created and sent into the world purely for this, but principally for that future state. And so no certain measure can be taken, no right or peremptory judgment can be made of God's justice and goodness toward us, without taking in the distributions of that life, which is the end of our living at all. But now the Scriptures have expressly declared that sufferings are a part of our discipline and trial; that all the sufferings of our mortal condition shall be therefore recompensed with immortal happiness and glory; and that, provided we receive our punishment as we ought, whatever offences are punished here shall be forgiven hereafter.

Suppose a servant then indebted to his master in a vast sum of money; suppose him injuriously treated and spoiled of his goods by a fellow servant, to whom he owes nothing: if what this servant loses by such ill treatment be abated him in the arrear due to his master, that servant is no loser by such injury; and if a great deal more be given him in consideration of what was so wrongfully taken away, then it is plain that, upon making up the whole account, he is at last a gainer by this exchange. Now just thus our great Lord deals with his servants; and this profit he turns all those things to which his own judgments, or the malice of wicked men, by his connivance, lay upon them here below. So much as they endure with meekness and patience, and a holy resignation to his divine will, so much he discounts from what they have deserved to endure hereafter. And, though this be not strictly the case of the Innocents before us, who, not being in a capacity of inflaming their reckoning by actual and wilful transgressions, could not stand in need of the same deductions with others; yet still the other branch of the argument holds good, which proceeds upon the giving his servants some better thing in reparation of the losses sustained in their present state. It is allowed they wanted the will of martyrdom, which ripper years may have; but then it must be allowed too, that they were clear of that voluntary and actual guilt which those ripper years would have contracted. So that, upon the whole matter, temporal death is the punishment of original sin. This God had a right to inflict, and to choose his own time and manner of doing it. And therefore convulsions, or a fever, or any other mortal disease incident to that tender age, is as much a reflection upon the providence of God, as the permitting them to fall by the sword, a sacrifice to the rage of a merciless tyrant.

But then for a frail, a short, a troublesome, a dangerous life, God gave them the recompense of an immortal, a securely happy, a completely glorious one. Happy in such a degree, as to consider their innocence and their sufferings, and the noble fruit which might have sprung from those tender plants had they been allowed to grow to full maturity.

Herein then, not only the justice of God is vindicated, but his liberality and the goodness of his providence was glorified. For happy sure were they, who so quickly made their port. Happy, who so escaped the storms and hazards, the temptations and defilements of a boisterous and naughty world. Happy, who received so bountiful a reward for that injustice of a barbarous murderer, who saved most effectually whom he meant to destroy, and sent them before into the joy of Him for whose sake they became a prey to implacable malice and unrelenting fury.

V. Fifthly, in the midst of so many melancholy observations we have this to comfort us, that Herod, notwithstanding all his endeavours to make the destruction of our Saviour sure, was yet disappointed. And indeed the vanity of wicked men is scarcely more conspicuous in any one instance than in the fond imaginations they flatter themselves with, of being able to compass their ends in rooting out those whom God resolves to preserve. He may and does suffer their mischievous intentions to succeed sometimes, and in some degree; but when he pleases to interpose, no subtlety, no force, not all the counsels, not all the armies upon earth, not all the stratagems in either, can prevail. For his is that watchful eye, ever open to discover the snares of death laid for his beloved ones. His that overruling hand that hews them in pieces, and says to the overflowings of ungodliness, as well as to those of the great deep, *Hither shall ye go, and no farther, and here will I stop your proud waves.* In short, he so orders the matter, that, both by the successes he permits and by those he forbids, his own glory and the good of his faithful servants shall most certainly be promoted.

The ways of bringing this about are various. Sometimes he does it by an immediate, visible, and miraculous exertion of his almighty power; and thus ^aSt. Peter was released out of prison, when chains and bars and iron gates opened to him of their own accord. Sometimes, by cutting short the enemy, and sweeping them away with a swift destruction; and thus the host of ^bAssyrians, who lay ready to devour Jerusalem, were in one night slain by a destroying angel. At other times, by preventing surprises, giving timely warnings, and furnishing leisure and opportunities for an escape; and thus Joseph here was, ^c*with the young child and his mother*, dispatched away into Egypt. But be it by these or by any other methods, that such merciful intentions take effect, still it is the Lord's doing; and the natural inference from hence, to all that attend to these events as they ought, will be that mentioned by the Psalmist: ^d*Verily there is a recompence for the righteous; doubtless there is a God that judgeth in the earth.*

Such are the observations proper for this festival, which we shall do well to improve, and apply in the following manner:

1. The dismal effects of Herod's ambition and rage should warn us to behave ourselves always with temper and moderation. Especially that we do so when our enemies, or those that provoke us, lie at our

^a Acts xii.

^b Isaiah xxxvii.

^c Ver. 13.

^d Psalm lviii. 11.

mercy. Greatness and wealth are apt to turn men's heads; but the effects of insolence to their brethren are never more deplorable than when they have the temptation of power, to crush those despised things that lie below them. Of all persons therefore anger is least proper for princes, who can scatter death and desolation with a word of their mouths. And, in proportion, it must misbecome all superiors to their inferiors, because this passion generally spurs men on to do the utmost they can do, and men are scarce ever very angry without being very unjust. It is fit then this unthinking, unruly evil should be held in with bit and bridle; and the less any man's condition restrains him from making his resentments of tragical consequence to others, the severer restraint and more steady government such a man ought constantly to keep over himself.

2. The steps taken by Herod toward this desperate wickedness should particularly deter us from hypocrisy and dissimulation; but, above all, from that most impious instance of it, the pretending religion for a cover to any unlawful and devilish contrivances. For I cannot but think it proper to observe, that the next thing we hear of Herod, after his dissembled intention to come and worship Jesus, when his real intent was to kill him, is the barefaced butchery of this day. And thus it often happens, that, when men find a formal show of religion cannot compass those ends it was put on to serve or to disguise, they presently throw off the mask, and lay aside all shame, all manner of regard for God and their duty. Nor is it indeed much to be wondered at, that those wretches should be given over to the blackest of crimes and most fatal of all delusions, who have sinned against their best remedy, and prostituted the very ordinances of God to an artifice for rendering themselves more successful in carrying on the service of the devil.

3. What hath been argued in vindication of the divine justice and goodness, with regard to the sin of Herod and the death of these children, should dispose us to entertain with patience and much meekness, not only the sufferings laid upon us by God's immediate hand, but likewise those which we endure from the wrongful dealings of wicked and unreasonable men. The injustice cannot in this case be greater than Herod's, nor can our innocence be more than that of those infants. Since then we have been taught by this example, that persons, the most inoffensive and undeserving, may be persecuted even to the death without any just reflection either upon their own virtue thus oppressed, or that providence which permits it to be so oppressed; our method in this case should be, to take sanctuary in the peace of a good conscience, to look up with a holy resignation of mind to the wise Disposer of every event, and to trust his mercy for the necessary comforts, the abundant compensation of all the hardships he sees fit for us to undergo. Which yet we should not undergo any one of, were it not more for his honour, nay, more for our advantage to have it thus than otherwise. For,

4. The remembrance of Herod's disappointment should quicken and establish our hope and faith in God. When dangers hem us in,

and our enemies on every side thrust sore at us that we may fall, then let us call to mind that he, who rescued his own Son, can never want means to deliver any son and servant of his, when such deliverance is seasonable and proper. But temporal deliverances are not always seasonable, not always most beneficial. And therefore our chief and most earnest desire should be, that we may find his assistance and protection always at hand to support us in our spiritual encounters. For, let our present difficulties be what they will, all will certainly be well at last, provided he do but grant the petition offered up to him this day: that is, *so to mortify and kill all vices in us, that by the innocency of our lives, and the constancy of our faith even unto death, we may glorify his holy name, through Jesus Christ our Lord.* Amen.

THE SUNDAY AFTER CHRISTMAS-DAY.

[The Collect the same with that of Christmas-day.]

THE EPISTLE. Galat. iv. 1.

- 1 *Now I say, That the heir, as long as he is a child, differeth nothing from a servant, though he be lord of all;* 1, 2. I would not be thought, by any thing that went before, to derogate from the just privileges of the Jewish church. It is certain they were designed by God to inherit the promises made by God to Abraham, from whom they descended. But the difference between that and the Christian dispensation may be conveniently enough represented by the case of an heir under age. Who, though he have an undoubted title to his father's estate, is yet, during his minority, kept under such discipline as is proper for the circumstances of his age and education, and committed to the care of directors and teachers, who exercise authority over him as if he were a common servant. And this subjection he continues in till the state of manhood and the time prefixed for his taking possession of his estate is come.
- 2 *But is under tutors and governors until the time appointed of the father.* 3, 4, 5. Thus, though the church of God, like that heir, was still but one and the same, yet it was treated differently, according to the different exigencies and capacities of the persons whereof it was composed. In its imperfect state, with more rigour and burthensome ceremonies, and such servile instances of obedience as were suited to the state of its childhood. But when arrived to maturity the method was changed: for then God sent his own Son
- 3 *Even so we, when we were children, were in bondage under the elements of the world;*
- 4 *But when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law;*
- 5 *To redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons.*

into the world, who was born of a virgin, and submitted to that law then in force; that by his punctual observance of it, they who till then lived under it might be freed from any farther obligation to observe it. And thus freed, might be adopted for his sake into sons, come under a more manly way of living, and pay from thenceforth an obedience agreeable to the liberty and the privileges of sons.

6 *And because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father.* 6. As a consequence and proof of which sonship, this common Father hath communicated the Spirit of his own natural and begotten to you his adopted sons. Which assures you of this adoption, and that you may now call and address yourselves to God as a Father, with all the confidence of being owned and accepted by him which that relation can justify and uses to inspire.

7 *Wherefore thou art no more a servant, but a son; and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ.* 7. Remember then the dignity to which thou art exalted, and assert the privileges belonging to it. Act henceforth not like a servant, but consider thyself as a son, nay, as an heir; for sons adopted are always such. And such art thou, an heir through hope of the kingdom and glory which Christ, God's natural Son, hath by birthright; and thou in right, and for the sake, of what he hath done for thee.

COMMENT.

THE apostle's main design in this Epistle, and particularly in that portion of it now before us, is to justify the liberty taught and taken by Christians, in not submitting to the yoke of the Jewish law; to assert the preeminence of the gospel above that law, and to shew how that liberty he so strenuously argues for came to belong to the disciples of Jesus Christ.

For a right understanding wherein the true force of his reasoning upon this occasion lies, it will be necessary to observe these following particulars:

1. That he allows and maintains the church of God to have been all along one and the same. And therefore the Jewish and the Christian church, when opposed to each other, are to be looked upon, not as two collective bodies perfectly distinct, but as one body under different states and capacities. This is very evident from the five first verses of the chapter, which illustrate the matter by a comparison taken from a very familiar instance in civil affairs. A comparison, not of two different persons, an heir and no heir, but of one and the same person with himself, distinguished according to different times and circumstances;—the heir while a child, and the heir arrived to maturity of age and understanding: the former at the first and third, with the latter at the fourth verse.

These dispensations are to be understood, not as contrary, but only introductory, the one to the other. This is evidently the meaning of that passage in the third chapter, ver. 24, which calls *the law* our

pedagogue, or schoolmaster, to bring us to Christ. So is it likewise of the allusion here, which describes the *elements of the world as a bondage expedient for children*, a discipline fitted to the imperfection of beginners; and consequently, to cease in course when the condition of the parties concerned in it should render them capable of a more liberal treatment and more perfect methods of instruction. Accordingly it follows, in that other place just quoted, *“but after that faith is come, we are no longer under a schoolmaster.”* And this gives us one good reason why the design of our redemption, by the teaching and incarnation and sufferings of the Son of God, though laid from all eternity, was yet put in execution no sooner. God, in this, like the rest of his dealings with mankind, condescending to and suffering their weaknesses; waiting till *“the fulness of time was come;”* and bringing them forward by such gentle and leisurely steps as their present condition qualified them for. But of this I have elsewhere given a more largo account, and mention it here only by the way.

3. When the adoption and the graces of the Spirit, the sonship and inheritance, are here ascribed to the gospel, as its proper effects and privileges, this is not so to be understood as if none of those good men who lived before our Lord’s appearing in the flesh had any part at all in such advantages. For many excellent persons there were even then, whose faith was vigorous and penetrating enough to see through the veil, and, if I may so say, anticipate these clearer revelations, and the benefits of the new covenant. As, on the other hand, there are vast numbers now, who, though the veil be long since done away, yet have it to this day upon their hearts. But neither the one nor the other of these cases affects the apostle’s argument in the least. And that for this plain reason, because the comparison here proceeds, not between persons and persons, but between dispensation and dispensation; not between these, again, so far as the one resembled, prefigured, implied, concurred with the other, but in respect of those parts only which are peculiar to each, and quite distinct from the other. Much less between these, lastly, with regard to the effects actually produced by either, but purely with regard to their respective genius and temper, and their aptness and natural tendency to produce such or such effects. And therefore, as it is no just reflection upon the gospel, that some who live under it are still acted by a *spirit of bondage*, because this is the fault of the men, and not of the dispensation; so neither is it any just commendation of the law, that some under that too were acted even then by a *spirit of adoption*, because this was not the excellence of the law strictly taken, but of the men, whose more advanced piety and spiritual knowledge attended to those dawnings of the gospel, which at that distance shone in upon their hearts. And to the influence of these it was, not to the law, considered abstractedly and apart from the gospel, that those then uncommon attainments and privileges were entirely owing.

4. From hence it will be no hard matter, in the fourth place, to

state the true difference between these two, and to explain wherein the prerogatives of the gospel above the law consist. The law burdened men with carnal ordinances, and ceremonies in themselves unprofitable. Ordinances that had a spiritual meaning, but such as few of the persons exercised in them entered into; ceremonies too of use, so far as they were typical, but the shadow was so thick as greatly to intercept the substance. The gospel propounds to us a service entirely rational and pure and spiritual. It leaves no cloud between to confound our sight, but carries us directly to Jesus Christ, the anti-type, the accomplishment, *the end of the law to every one that believeth*. The promises and threatenings then were temporal in terms, though of mercies and punishments eternal by implication; but these are now expressly of things future and eternal, and the temporal are no longer the proper rewards, but only the additional encouragements of our obedience. The revelations of the divine will were then partial and dark; they are now explicit and full. The graces of the Holy Spirit were then sparingly exhibited, and few seem to have received them in large measures, because that few gave themselves the trouble of applying to the spiritual mysteries signified by the outward figures; this Spirit now is distributed liberally to all who are disposed to ask and receive and improve by it. But still the assistances of the Spirit was a gospel privilege, and never belonged to the law farther than that first included this second covenant. Hence was the service then mercenary, and the greater part who paid it were acted by a principle of fear; the scourge always over them, and the wages down in hand; the work toilsome, and the profit small: but ours now proceeds upon more generous motives, as inspired by faith and love; our business is more manly and ingenuous; our expectations vast, beyond what we are able to ask or think, and not an hire, but an inheritance. So distant is the condition of those servants and those sons; of an economy, under which it was very rare to rise above the station and disposition of servants; and of one, in which nothing servile remains, but all are in a capacity of being sons, and not only sons, but *heirs of God through Christ*.

Now, in regard this is a promotion, the conferring whereof St. Paul makes the peculiar glory of the gospel, and an effect worthy our Lord's incarnation to procure for us; and consequently such as a right apprehension of must needs raise our thankfulness and our wonder, while our hearts are still warm with the annual remembrance of that mystery of love; wisely to be sure does the church offer it to your meditation this day. And, in hope to serve the good purposes of her doing so, my present discourse shall be employed upon it.

The privilege of being sons and heirs is here represented as one, the latter a necessary consequence of the former. And it is our inestimable happiness that these are never separated in fact; but so it is likewise, that when they be (as be they may) separated in our consideration, each of them singly suggests such variety of matter as would more than suffice for the usual limits of a discourse. And therefore I shall now confine myself to the first, reserving the second

for another opportunity, which the method I am engaged in will put into my hands hereafterⁱ.

The manner of treating this subject shall be,

I. First, to shew under what notion or character it is that Christians are properly *the sons of God*.

II. Secondly, to observe what are the conditions that concur to the making that title good to us. But,

III. Thirdly, and principally, to press upon you some reflections, proper to possess us with a becoming sense both of our advantage and our duty upon this occasion.

I. First, I begin with shewing under what notion or character it is that Christians are properly the sons of God. And it is necessary to explain this point, because this relation to God is attributed in Scripture to very different subjects, and upon very different accounts. He is called *the Father of the rain, and beggetter of the drops of dew*, because the inanimate parts of the creation derive their being from him. The angels are called *his sons*, because spirits of a Spirit, and so nearest resembling him of any part of created nature. So are the spirits of good men departed to a state of immortality, because *they cannot die any more*, and in this *are equal to the angels*. ^a Adam is called so, because framed by his immediate hand. The blessed Jesus is called so, because formed in the womb of an unblemished Virgin by the ^ooperation of the Holy Ghost. But he is so called, yet more properly, because his *Person*, his *begotten*, his *only Son*, because of the same nature, and one^s with him from all eternity. Now it is manifest, that, of these several acceptations, some cannot possibly belong to us at any time; others not now, though they may hereafter; and of the rest, which may at present, none can be peculiar to us as Christians. And yet under this character alone we are here entitled sons, and at the same time told how we were made so, which is by *adoption*.

Now adoption (as appears from the laws and customs of the countries where it hath obtained) is an act of favour, whereby the master of an estate takes persons of another stock, and receives them as his own children. These persons so received, if slaves before, are hereby freed of course^t; and then, as freemen, they take the name, and succeed to a right of the inheritance of the adopter. All which was publicly transacted, and the mutual consent of all parties solemnly declared before a public magistrate. This is the account given us of that which the lawyers called *adrogation*, or perfect adoption. A method contrived for the continuance of names and support of families, and for the consolation of those who either might have expected but never had any children, or who were by death deprived of them they had.

They who at all understand the nature and use of similitudes are not so unreasonable as to require in any case an exact agreement in

ⁱ Epistle for Eighth Sunday after Trinity.

^m Luke xx. 36.

ⁿ Luke iii. 38.

^o 1 John v. 1.

^r John iii. 16.

^t Vinn. in Inst. tit. xi. lib. i.

^k Job xxxviii. 28.

^a Luke i. 35.

^s John i. 1; x. 30; Rom. ix. 5; Heb. i. 2, 3.

^l 1b. v. 7.

^p Rom. viii. 37.

every circumstance. Much less can we expect it where God and men, and their respective actions, are the terms of the comparison. It ought to content us in this case, if there be resemblance sufficient to justify the allusion; and that this hold so far, in some of the main strokes, as to give us a tolerable notion of the thing, and to render that expression more proper than any other.

Now here is in like manner an act of marvellous grace, in suffering wretches, who before were aliens and strangers, nay, slaves to the enemy of souls, and sold under sin, to be first taken into liberty, and then into the family of that God from whom they had estranged themselves; and this too upon the death of an only Son, not reducing his Father indeed to any want of natural issue, or a necessity of supplying himself this way; but taking our nature and becoming the Son of man, that we might thereby become the sons of God. Dying in that nature to deliver us from the curse, to which every partaker of it was liable; and so purchasing for us that freedom which was a necessary qualification and step to our adoption. Devolving by this means his merits and his claims upon us; drawing us as near to a natural sonship as the condition of the thing would bear. Vouchsafing to be one with us and in us, and to make us one with and in him; and so to convey to us a good and legal assurance of a share (as large a share as we are capable of) in those advantages and glories and royalties which he hath an indefeasible right to by natural descent. Thus the Son is said to have *loved us, and washed us in his own blood*, and to have *made us kings and priests unto God and his Father*. Thus it is said that *he which sanctifieth and they who are sanctified are all of one; for which cause he is not ashamed to call them brethren*; that in regard the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself took part of the same, that through death he might deliver them who were all their lifetime subject to bondage. Thus the Father is said to have *predestinated us to the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will, to the praise and glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the beloved, in whom we have redemption through his blood*. And once more, in the Scripture now under consideration, that *God sent forth his Son*, (and consequently a Son before he was so sent forth,) that this Son was *made of a woman*, (a very man of the substance of his Virgin mother,) *made under the law*, (submitting to, and punctually discharging those temporary ordinances which he came to abolish,) for so it follows, *to redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons*.

From all this it appears, that so far as the free good will of the adopter, and the advantages accruing to the persons adopted, are concerned, the allusion is just and good. And these are the principal parts in the comparison. If the motives to it, and the methods made use of in it, do not come up to the same resemblance, we are not to wonder, because this is an instance of love, of which none but God, who is love itself, was capable. And therefore we must not among

^u Rev. i. 5, 6.

^x Heb. ii. 11, 14, 15.

^y Ephes. i. 5, 6, 7.

^z Ver. 4, 5.

men look to meet with any thing like it, any thing near it. Somewhat more of likeness however we may discover, with regard to the mutual consent required in common adoptions, under that which I proposed for my

II. Second head. The conditions, I mean, that must concur for making this title good to us. Which, I think, two or three plain texts may suffice to shew: such as that in the first of St. John's Gospel, at the twelfth and thirteenth, *As many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name: which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.* That this receiving Christ and believing on his name are terms of like importance, and explanatory of each other, we need no other proof than that given us in the third of this Epistle. Where St. Paul, describing (as here) the privileges of Christians released from the Jewish yoke, says, *"After that faith is come, ye are no longer under a schoolmaster, for ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus: for as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ.* And once more, in a passage parallel to this I am now upon, *"As many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God.* And how we are to attain that guidance, I take to be evident from this declaration to Titus^c, that God according to his mercy hath saved us, *by the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Ghost; and that other of our blessed Lord himself, "Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.*

The sum then of the second particular amounts to thus much. That God, of his infinite goodness to mankind, hath condescended to advance them to an honourable and happy state, a near relation to himself, such as by nature they had not, could not have. That this however (though all are capable of it by virtue of that death, which is a ransom sufficient for all) is a blessing not conferred on all promiscuously; that faith in Christ is a necessary qualification for it; and this faith solemnly professed in the sacrament of baptism, where we enter into covenant with God, profess to be and are accepted for his. And since that water is accompanied by the Spirit, since the conferring that Spirit is not only the privilege but the proof of our sonship, most truly does our church teach us to confess that *"in baptism we were made the children of God; most properly after the administration of that sacrament does she yield hearty thanks to God, that he hath regenerated the party by his holy Spirit, received him for his own by adoption, and made him an heir of everlasting salvation.* The short is, this adoption belongs to us, not as we are creatures, or men, but as we are believers and new creatures in Christ. Nor is this limitation of the blessing any detraction from the freedom of the gift, or the bounty of the giver; his love and goodness still continues the sole efficient and impulsive cause. These only moved him to bestow it at all. And therefore, as we have no occasion to complain of his imparting it to whom and upon what terms he sees fit, so is it still more

^a Gal. iii. 25, 26, 27.

^b Rom. viii. 14.

^c Tit. iii. 5.

^d John iii. 5.

^e Catechism, answer 2. Baptism of infants.

worthy such a Father not to vouchsafe the dignity of sons to them that would prove a reproach to the family they are taken into. It is grace must make us what nature cannot; and the Spirit of him in our hearts who died to redeem us from all iniquity, that alone can warrant us, without arrogance or vanity, to call the great Lord of heaven and earth what he, to whom we owe this relation, was pleased to style him, when he calls his disciples *brethren, his Father and our Father, his God and our God.*

Having thus, as I hope, sufficiently explained the nature and the conditions of our adoption to be sons of God, I come to

III. The third and last part of my design; which is, to press some reflections that may make us sensible both of our privilege and our duty upon this occasion.

1. The first of these reflections St. John hath propounded to you already in the third of his first Epistle: *Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God.* Upon us, whether Jews or Gentiles, bond or free, learned or ignorant, high or low, rich or poor. So differently does the King of heaven dispense his favours, from the manner in use with his viceregents upon earth. These, though exalted in dignity only, but still the same in nature, admit not those of their fellow creatures, their fellow members, their brethren, so much as to tread their courts or to make up their train, whom either meanness of fortune, or deformity of person, or any of those miseries which need the benefit of such access most, have rendered objects of pity. Yet even these the Son of God is not ashamed to call brethren, even these the Father Almighty does not disdain for his children: but contracts, invites to the closest alliances between the Majesty of God and the very vilest of that dust and ashes framed by him into man.

So different again is this from the common adoptions, where the persons taken in were either distant kindred, or generally such as had somewhat very extraordinary to recommend them. But we, besides the meanness of our condition by nature, had no deserts to boast, nothing but what might raise an aversion against us, no privileges but what had been abused to the Giver's dishonour before. And yet, from this fallen state of guilt and unworthiness, misery and despair, we are translated to favour and a hope full of immortality; from strangers and enemies, to friends and children; from being the deserved objects of God's hatred, and *vessels of wrath fitted to destruction*, we are embraced in the arms of his mercy, and cherished in the bosom of a Father. So much more tender is his affection, so much more kind and free our adoption, than any other ever was or could be.

And as more free, so more beneficial too. For what could the great ones upon earth advance their adscititious children to? An uncertain honour, or a perishing possession, a swelling title, or an ancient name: alas! how poor and little things are these, in com-

parison with the favour of a God unchangeable, a treasure in heaven, nay a crown of glory ! We are weak enough oftentimes to bear ourselves wondrous high upon the pompous pageantry of a long pedigree ; upon honours not our own ; and perhaps, if the whole secret were out, not our ancestors' neither upon any very creditable account. (The effects of extortion or bribery, of falsehood or treachery, of obsequious ministering to the vices of one above them, exorbitant in his pride, arbitrary in his measures, or brutish in his lusts.) These wretched appearances serve to keep people above contempt, who have nothing of personal worth to screen them from it. But the relation I am treating of is an honour indeed. It lets us into the noblest alliances, it cannot be blown upon by faction or sacrificed to popular fury, it is never given promiscuously, never taken away unjustly. In a word, to discern this wonderful love in some tolerable measure, let us endeavour to frame some idea of the natural and only begotten son of God ; and then consider that his bliss and glory are reflected down upon the adopted sons. So near approaches are permitted us, so honourable now is our condition from the most wretched and scandalous that could be ; that as he who is love itself would not give less, it does not appear how we could receive more, and still continue to be men.

2. Secondly, the consideration of our being God's children is both a mighty encouragement in our duty, and a direction with what spirit and temper we should go about it. This secures us from all those instances of rigour and arbitrary power which are imposed to preserve the authority of the commander, and keep those of inferior condition at an awful distance. But the power of every wise parent is tempered with tenderness and respect to children ; and requires such acts of obedience only as are ingenuous, fit for their quality, and such as carry their own motives to compliance along with them.

This likewise takes off that horror and dread wherewith men under an absolute and imperious master are apt to be confounded, and begets a reasonable presumption of kind allowances and great compassion at a father's hand. It is upon those accounts that St. Paul prefers the gospel-economy above the law, calling the former *'the spirit of bondage unto fear'*, but the latter, *'the spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father'*. That shewed men their guilt, burdened their consciences with horror and confusion, but turned them over to the gospel for comfort and relief. For the gospel alone shews God in goodness and mercy reconciled by the death of his Son. This lays aside the terrible aspect of the taskmaster and the judge, and brings the mild indulgent countenance of the parent to succeed in its place. Thus the psalmist does, and thus our own experience may teach us to describe him : *'Like as a father pitieth his own children, so is the Lord merciful unto them that fear him ; for he knoweth whereof we are made, he remembereth that we are but dust'*. This gives us confidence that he, for many backslidings, many wanderings and strayings, will not yet utterly cast us off, provided we do but amend at last ; and that when-

^f Rom. viii. 15.

^g Psalm ciii. 13, 14.

ever we return, it is not possible for us to desire more passionately to be well received, than he does, that we would give him the opportunity of shewing how kindly he is disposed to receive us. Much more does this assure us that our slips will be overlooked, our failings kindly interpreted, our weaknesses pitied, every thing not directly voluntary not charged in account to us; but our honest though very poor endeavours to please graciously accepted. For none but Egyptian tyrants demand brick without straw; and fathers, least of any, require from children what they are sensible it is not in their power to perform.

Hence then we are plainly directed, that the spirit most becoming a Christian in his duty is such as inspires vigour and life, hope and joy, a holy confidence, a cheerful and affectionate obedience. To carry the torment of fear about perpetually, and act upon principles put into us by the scourge and the gibbet, is the misery of slaves, unworthy the character of freemen, and by no means agreeable either to the dignity of a Christian or the honour of God. For God is most glorified by our service when that is made our choice, and springs from thankfulness and love; when we are fearful to offend, because loath to displease; when our diligence speaks our desire of giving satisfaction, and the manner of going about it shews we take delight in our business, and are content with our wages, and have a true respect for him we serve. This is the true temper of every good servant, much more of every good child, who cannot, ought not at least to consider his parent's indulgence without inferring from thence his own obligations to serve him with faithfulness, and to serve him with gladness too. And therefore it were in us most inexcusable to do otherwise, who have, as Christians, the highest obligations of this kind, a Father whose goodness is infinite, and a service that is perfect freedom.

3. This consideration, that we are sons of God, should make us exceeding ambitious to be like God. Among men, we know, such resemblances are usual, and extend not only to features of body, but to temper of mind, nay, to all the manner and behaviour of the parent. And such likeness is commonly very engaging; so that a more than equal measure of tenderness and delight follows the liveliest image of the father. Now, how far we are from any possibility of being like God in our natural frame needs not be said; but in the disposition of the soul, we may and must arrive at some resemblance of him. Holiness and purity, justice and charity, and all his communicable excellencies, may be drawn, though drawn in miniature only, upon our hearts. And to such strokes of likeness St. Paul exhorts, when he bids us *be followers of God as dear children*, and our blessed Saviour, when commanding the love of our enemies, that we may *be the children of our Father which is in heaven*. Both, it is worth observing, urge the necessity of the resemblance from the nearness of the relation. But St. John hath a most remarkable text to

this purpose: *'Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be, but we know that when he shall appear we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is.* Now, if our happiness hereafter will consist in being like God, and that likeness again will follow upon our nearer approach to and more distinct knowledge of him; then it is plain that our constant desire and care, yea and truest happiness, in the mean while, must be to see and know and imitate as much of him as we can. And that we are extremely to blame, and wanting to ourselves, in not labouring to approach the perfections of his nature; which is indeed but to finish and consummate those of our own. This is what he expects, that the distinction of our family should be visible upon us. And if it be remembered that there is no middle race of men, ¹but all are either the children of God or children of the devil; and that the doing or not doing righteousness is a manifest mark to which of these two every man belongs; this is enough to shew the necessity of a good life for attracting our heavenly Father's love. For, sure, to preserve this divine relation inviolate between God and us, I need not say it is necessary we be not children of the devil.

4. If all Christians be the children of God, then are they likewise all mutually allied to one another; and that in such degree as induces the strongest engagements to justice and peace and charity. When Moses interposed between two Israelites, he thought this would, he knew it ought to have been motive sufficient for taking up the quarrel, *'Sirs, ye are brethren; why do ye wrong one to another?* The mischiefs and hatefulness of strife and division are but too many and too manifest in people of the greatest distance from each other. But when the venom works under one and the same roof, when they who came out of the same bowels, and hung upon the same breasts are infected, the whole house is presently in a flame, and the feuds grow too unnatural and too scandalous to be borne. And yet even this is not more heinous, more absurd than it is among Christians, who have *one Saviour, one Spirit, one Father*; who are purchased with the same blood, fed and brought up at the same table, begotten and born anew by the same grace, and consequently are one flock, one family, and ought to be *of one heart and of one soul*. These near degrees of kindred should therefore be well thought upon; for were they not forgotten, it is not easy to conceive how vices in this regard so monstrous, as envy and malice, contention and cruelty, or any manner of hardheartedness, should ever get footing where the doctrine and profession of the gospel had already taken place.

5. We have from this relation to God an excellent support under afflictions. These are represented unto us under the quality of chastisements; and the corrections of good parents are for the most part very gentle. Their severity scarce ever more, seldom so much as is necessary. And many a time, when provocations have lifted up the hand, nature steps in, and is sure to prevent or moderate the blow.

In like manner hath our heavenly Father his tenderesses and his yearnings too; ^mhis mercies, and the sounding of his bowels toward us. ⁿHe declares he does not afflict willingly, nor grieve the children of men. ^oHis compassions are said to exceed those of the most affectionate mothers: and though his wisdom restrain him from such indiscreet fondness as would spare, when we might profit by punishment, yet even then when justice must exert, mercy abates the strokes, and wisdom directs the remainder to excellent purposes. So that, provided we submit with patience till his ends are answered upon us, it is even good for us that we were in trouble. And although the light of God's countenance may retire behind a thick black cloud for a while, yet all the Father will shine forth again, not only in a happy issue out of but in a glorious reward for all our afflictions.

6. Lastly, this relation to God gives us assured hopes of a gracious answer to our prayers, and sufficient supplies of all necessary provisions. With regard to the former, our blessed Saviour forbids the use of vain repetitions: upon this consideration, that our *Father knoweth what things we have need of before we ask him*. Asked indeed he will be, but he requires it more for our sakes than his own. Not for the state and formality of the thing, but to keep up in us a sense of our constant dependence upon his goodness, and to draw us into a more intimate familiarity with himself, by these frequent applications to the throne of grace. And the remembrance of our being children, when we come thither, teaches us not only why, but how we ought to ask, viz. with a becoming resignation of mind, and all due deference to his wisdom, who knows better how to choose for us than we do for ourselves; with an humble confidence in his goodness, that whatever he sees most expedient shall never be refused us; and with a faithful perseverance in those requests, which, though not always denied when delayed, are yet often delayed for our much greater benefit. For God is the proper judge, not only of the things to be given, but of the measures and the seasons of giving. And therefore to them who are careful to ask with all the duty and reverence of children greater encouragement cannot possibly be imagined, than the giving us leave to put him in mind what he is to us; when beginning our prayers with that most endearing of all titles, *Our Father which art in heaven*.

So again, when our Lord would moderate that anxious and inordinate concern which men's minds are so apt to be perplexed and tortured with about the necessaries of the present life, he does it with this reflection, that *our heavenly Father knoweth we have need of all these things*. Implying that it can never consist with that character of a father, to leave us destitute of those supplies which it is always in his power to furnish, and out of our power to subsist without. And the mistake of those who are apt to think themselves neglected upon these occasions is, first, that they make wrong judgments of their own condition, in supposing themselves to want what really they do not:

and then, that they stretch those promises, which are our security against the necessities of nature, to so many engagements for convenience and ease and abundance. And once again we should know, that with respect to necessaries, it makes no difference whether we be supplied from our own or from other hands; whether by our substance or our labour; or by the liberality of those friends whom God raises up for us in our disability and distress. For both these are the Lord's doings; and he, who hath obliged himself to furnish us, hath left himself at liberty to choose what particular methods he will furnish us by. But after all, the most effectual way of silencing all distrusts or murmurings of this kind is to consider that this is a spiritual relation; and consequently, that the comforts rising from it, though they extend to wants of every kind, are chiefly such as meet with our spiritual wants. Constant and seasonable recruits of inward strength and grace, the bread of life, and wine of elect souls, the mystical banquets of the body and blood of Christ, and all the supports and refreshments requisite to nourish us up unto life eternal; these are the sustenance agreeable to such a father; and in these we may rest assured, he will never be wanting to his children. Not only so; but when his table has fed us, and we are grown up by the bounty of it to the *fulmess of the stature of perfect men in Christ Jesus*, he hath laid up for us a plentiful portion, and, like a truly provident father, taken effectual care for our future settlement. A settlement durable beyond time itself, and ample and noble as his own immortal happiness: for this is the sum of all our privileges; this the crown of all our obedience and all our expectations, that *if we be sons, then are we heirs too, oven heirs of God through Christ*. Of which, as I proposed in the beginning of this discourse, (by his good leave and assistance,) hereafter.

THE GOSPEL. St. Matth. i. 18.

- 18 *Now the birth of Jesus Christ was on this wise: When as his mother Mary was espoused to Joseph, before they came together, she was found with child of the Holy Ghost.* 18. The manner of Jesus being born of Mary, though not of Joseph, who is therefore only called her husband, not his father, (ver. 16.) was indeed extraordinary and full of wonder. For thus it fell out: his mother was the espoused wife of Joseph, but, before any knowledge of her bed, she was discovered to be with child; and she was so by the operation of the Holy Ghost.
- 19 *Then Joseph her husband, being a just man, and not willing to make her a publick example, was minded to put her away privily.* 19. This discovery cost Joseph much perplexity. The law in these cases was very severe, and he, loath to carry things to an extremity, was desirous to save her both from shame and suffering by a private separation.
- 20 *But while he thought on these things, behold, the angel of the Lord appeared* 20. But these troubles were soon composed by an

unto him in a dream, saying, *Joseph, thou son of David, fear not to take unto thee Mary thy wife: for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Ghost.* angel, sent to reveal the whole secret, and to assure him that all this was no stain, either upon his wife's honour or his; that here was no injury done him, but all was entirely the work of the Holy Spirit of God.

21 *And she shall bring forth a Son, and thou shalt call his name JESUS: for he shall save his people from their sins.* 21. Foretelling at the same time, that this child should be a son, and directing him to be called *Jesus*,

a name importing that salvation from sin, which all who believe and obey him should receive by his means.

22 *Now all this was done, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet, saying,* 22. Thus it pleased God to fulfil a most remarkable prophecy given by Isaiah to the house of David, as a sign that they should not be extinguished by the calamities they then lay under the dread of.

23 *Behold, a virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel, which being interpreted is, God with us.* 23. That a pure virgin should bring a Son, so remarkable a blessing, so divine a person, that all men should perceive the extraordinary favour and presence of God in him.

24 *Then Joseph being raised from sleep did as the angel of the Lord had bidden him, and took unto him his wife:* 24. This gave Joseph, who had otherwise most reason to be scrupulous,

such entire satisfaction, that (though before he durst not) now he dwelt with his wife, in obedience to the command of the angel, and in full persuasion of her virtue.

25 *And knew her not till she had brought forth her firstborn son: and he called his name JESUS.* 25. Yet so as never to take any conjugal liberties with her till after the birth

of this her firstborn Son; who, as had been likewise directed, had that significant name of *Jesus* given him.

COMMENT.

THE Epistle for this day hath told us, that, *when the fulness of time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman*; the Gospel proceeds in explaining that work of wonder, and acquaints us particularly with the uncommon manner of his being so made. And therefore, as our meditations on the day of his nativity were fixed upon the glories of his divine, those of this day more properly confine themselves to the reality of his human nature. Those shewed us *God of the substance of his Father, begotten before the worlds*; these show us *man of the substance of his mother, born in the world*. But both together give us a just idea of that *one Christ, who is God and man, perfect God and perfect man, of a reasonable soul and human flesh subsisting*.

It is not without excellent good reason that the person made choice of here to be first satisfied in this extraordinary conception should be

Joseph ; one whose relation to the holy mother, as it made him most concerned to have satisfaction given him of her virtue, so would it naturally render him cautious of being imposed upon in the matter. Accordingly we find, by what steps he came up to this persuasion, from whence his scruples rose, what uneasiness they produced, and by what methods they were quieted. It was a customary thing with the Jews for a considerable time to intervene between the espousals or solemn contract, and the parties cohabiting, in all points, as man and wife. During this interval, it is plain, it was, that Joseph's frequent conversation with his beloved spouse gave him opportunities of discovering her to be with child. And yet this was so ordered, that they, who knew nothing of the mysterious manner of it, might reasonably enough suppose him the father of that child ; and so there was provided a sufficient protection for his wife's honour against the suspicions and scandal of the world. With child he found she was by his own observation and apparent signs of the thing. Which will seem less strange, if we compare the 26th and 27th with the 56th verse of St. Luke's first chapter. These place at least three months between their espousals and Mary's return to her own house, from a visit made to her cousin Elizabeth. With child by himself he knew she was not ; with an adulteress he knew it both a shame and a sin to live ; to expose her life and reputation upon this account he was loath ; and, in the midst of these distracting thoughts, he is let into the whole secret, and set perfectly at ease by the method related at large in this portion of Scripture.

The substance and design then of this passage, you easily perceive, extends to the several parts of our Lord's incarnation ; considered with regard, first, to the agent or person effecting it : secondly, to the person passive in it, or her upon whom this miraculous operation took place : and, thirdly, to an ancient and very remarkable prophecy, of which this miracle was the proper and intended accomplishment. Of the last of these I shall have a fit occasion to discourse at large hereafter, and shall therefore choose at present to confine my thoughts to the two former.

First then, for a convenient understanding so much of our Lord's incarnation as falls within our compass, it is necessary to observe the agent, or person effecting this wonderful conception. *'She was found with child of the Holy Ghost,* says St. Matthew. And accordingly the angel in 'St. Luke resolves that question of the astonished virgin, *How shall this be, seeing I know not a man ?* by the following reply : *The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee : therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God.* In these words, agreeable to the usual modesty and great decency of Scripture language, is implied all that action of the Holy Ghost, whereby the virgin was enabled to become fruitful, and the place of ordinary generation was in this case supplied. For, that there was no concurrence of any such cause, not only she her-

* For the Epistle of Annunciation.

* Ver. 18.

† Luke i. 35.

self, in St. Luke, but the angel, by whom she was visited, testifies; when, for strengthening her belief of a production so unexampled, so astonishing, he declares it the work of God, with whom she ought to remember that *"nothing is impossible."* To the same point this evangelist is clear, not only when relating her pregnancy as antecedent to ²Joseph's and her coming together, which excludes her husband from any part in it; but much more, when applying to this matter a prophecy of ³Isaiah, which yet could not be otherwise fulfilled than by excluding every other man as well as her husband.

Now, when this action is in Scripture represented as entirely the work of God, and yet attributed to the Holy Ghost in particular; we are not to understand it so peculiarly his, that the two other Persons subsisting in the Godhead should have no concern in it. For here that rule of the schools takes place, that the entire union of the divine nature makes all such actions common to all three, as do not refer to the properties and relations by which they stand distinguished from each other. *Jesus* is therefore *the Son of God*, because conceived by the Spirit of the Father. And the same Son of God, who raised his own body from death and the grave, formed that same body in the virgin's womb. All which notwithstanding, this action is in more especial manner assigned to the Holy Ghost, though common to the Father and the Son, because fructifying and sanctifying are, in the sacred style, generally attributed to his influences. As therefore he began the first creation by ²*moving* (or brooding as it were) upon the face of the waters; so did he here begin the new creation, by conveying a principle and power of fruitfulness into a person otherwise incapable of it. And yet, as there, without the Father and his Divine Word or Son, *"not any thing was made that was made:"* so did he here bring this second, this ³*creation of a new thing* to effect, by the same cooperation of the whole undivided Trinity, as he had done the former.

But, although the ends of an ordinary generation were all answered by this action, yet was it not in all the effects agreeable to such. For common fathers beget sons of their own likeness and substance, and herein it is that the paternal relation is properly founded. Now this could not be done in the present case, because the substance of the Holy Ghost is eternal, uncreated, divine; but the substance of Christ, conceived in and born of the Virgin, is human, created, and had a beginning in time. Therefore I said, that the Spirit enabled the Virgin to bring forth; therefore Christ cannot with any propriety be called the Son of the Holy Ghost, nor, strictly speaking, the Son of God with reference to this birth. He is indeed the Son of God, as man, because (like Adam) an extraordinary effect from a divine cause, working after an extraordinary manner. But, strictly and truly, he is the Son of God by virtue of his eternal generation alone, because by this alone he is *God, begotten of the substance of his Father.* But a human effect must have a human cause; and, though the manner of

¹ Luke i. 37.² Ver. 18.³ Ver. 22, 23.⁴ Gen. i. 2.⁵ Heb. i. 2; John i. 3.⁶ Jer. xxxi. 22.

production was above nature, yet the substance of Christ's natural body, to answer the end of his being born, must be made out of the substance of some other natural body; and what that was, we shall have occasion to consider by and by.

In the meanwhile that other quality, observed just now to be more particularly attributed to the Holy Ghost, appears to have been concerned in this matter too; that, I mean, of sanctifying and rendering this fruit of the Virgin, as the angel most emphatically terms it, *that holy thing which should be born of her*. He who came into the world to cleanse others could not perform this office regularly unless perfectly clean himself. But the stain of our common parent sticks so close to every natural descendant of his, that the human nature cannot be ordinarily communicated without it. And hence grew an absolute necessity, that the Saviour and sanctifier of the world should be conceived in a method beside and above the usual course of nature. Now he, that sprung from the immediate operation of that Spirit, who is the fountain of all holiness and purity, and that operation too upon the person of an undefiled and blessed mother, he hath effectually provided against all the difficulties of common births, is altogether untainted with lust or sin, and so *the Lamb of God, without blemish and without spot*.

Secondly, that chaste and holy mother therefore is next to be considered, as the other party concerned in this miraculous birth; and there are three respects in which we shall do well to consider her. The first regards her own person. The second, her relation to Christ. The last, her virginity, notwithstanding that relation.

As to the first of these, I cannot think it worth while to mention any particular significations of the name Mary, or the fanciful collections some zealots have made from thence. It is, no doubt, more material to our purpose to take notice that she is described of the house and lineage of David, of the tribe of Judah, espoused to a descendant of the same tribe and family, and an inhabitant of Nazareth^d. All this appears, not only from the genealogies in St. Matthew and St. Luke, but by their going up together to Bethlehem, in obedience to the Roman emperor, who had commanded all the Jews to be *taxed* or enrolled according to their respective conditions, and at the cities of the several houses from whence they sprung. Thus were those prophecies fulfilled, of the Christ springing from the tribe of Judah, being the *Son of David*, and called a *Nazarene*. And although the Scriptures seem chiefly careful to give us the pedigree of Joseph, for whose Son, not only in vulgar but legal estimation Jesus was to pass, yet, when the author to the Hebrews affirms, as a matter evident beyond all contradiction, that *our Lord sprang out of Judah*, this is warrant sufficient for concluding his mother to have been of that tribe: because, were she not so, he did not spring from thence, as will appear more fully by and by.

The next thing then concerning her is the relation she bore to

^c Luke i. 35.

^d Luke i. 27.

^e Matt. i; Luke iii; ii. 3, 5.

^f Heb. vii. 15.

Jesus. *His mother Mary.* And this she was in the most strict and literal sense. She is said to have *conceived him in her womb*, she nourished this burthen; a necessary consequence of her *being great with child*; she bore him about in her body the usual time of mothers, for, while at Bethlehem, in order to be taxed, *the days were accomplished that she should be delivered.* Which phrase imports not any term of time appointed for her in particular, different from the rest of her sex in like cases, but that season, called elsewhere *the time of life, and the full time being come.* And then, and not before, it was that *she brought forth her firstborn Son*, which is the last and finishing circumstance necessary to make good the title of mother.

He then, who was conceived in Mary's womb, who grew there in proportion to other children, who stayed there the full time of other births, who was nourished during that time as others are, till ripe for the birth; who, at the end of that time, was born after the manner of common infants: he was as truly and properly her Son as any other is the son of her who bore him. And Mary, in regard of him, was as properly a mother as any other woman is, or can be, of any child whatsoever, in the ordinary way of generation.

May we not say indeed, that she was more properly and strictly a mother than any common mother is or can be? For whereas in the usual course of nature children partake in the substance of both parents, the whole of Christ's human substance was derived from her alone. It having been sufficiently proved already that neither Joseph nor any man whatsoever contributed the least to this production; and consequently, that it was not *of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.*

But how of God? As an efficient cause *by which*, not as a material cause *out of which*, this substance was made. The same Almighty Power that formed the first woman out of man alone did upon this occasion form a man out of woman alone. And therefore that *prophecy*, applied by the author to the Hebrews to this purpose, expresses the thing with great exactness, *A body hast thou prepared, the original is rather fashioned, fitted up for me.* But, though the formation was God's, the matter of which he formed it was Mary's. So that, as we truly confess Christ to be *God of the substance of the Father, begotten before the worlds*, it is with equal truth that we believe him *man of the substance of his mother, born in the world.*

He must have been so, to make good the ancient predictions concerning him. The promise to Abraham ran, that *in his seed all the nations of the earth should be blessed*; and the seed there meant, St. Paul says expressly, *was Christ.* He was promised to David as one to come out of his loins; so that *the Son of David* was a title in use to signify the *Messiah.* This is the *Root of Jesse*, and the *Righteous Branch*; but how, except he came of their posterity, grow out from

* *Matth. i. 18.*

b Luke i. 31; ii. 5.

1 Luke ii. 6.

* *Gen. xviii. 10; Luke i. 57; ii. 7; Matth. i. 25.*

1 Σῶμα κατηρτίστω μοι, Heb. x. 5.

m Gen. xxii. 18; Galat. iii. 16; Psalm cxxxii. 12; xxii. 31; Matth. xxi. 9; Luke i. 32. Isaiah xi. 1; Zech. vi. 12.

that tree, and were essentially united to the stock? He then, who was not so, in respect of Joseph or any other man, from whom he received nothing, nor in respect of the Holy Ghost, from whom he received only the form, must have been so in respect of his mother Mary; and so of her, because of her proper and actual substance he received the materials of his human nature.

Therefore the Scriptures, with great significance, call him *"the seed of the woman, the Son of God made of a woman*, and the like. None of which titles could be proper, or so much as true, had the virgin contributed nothing more upon this occasion than the carrying this burthen and bringing into the world a body miraculously framed and conveyed into her for that purpose. But that which we are taught to believe of the matter is this. That Christ's human nature was entirely taken from his mother; that by a wonderful efficacy of almighty power his body was formed not only in her, but of her; that thus he truly became, what otherwise he could not have been, the seed of *"Abraham and David, according to the flesh*. Mary was therefore upon all accounts strictly and literally his mother; and upon some accounts more strictly so than any other woman ever was the mother of any other child.

Thirdly, the last thing which calls for our observation under this head is, the pure inviolate virginity of this mother. A truth, clear, as from sundry positive texts, so particularly from the passage now before us, and those already alleged in this discourse upon it. For if not only Joseph, but all mankind are excluded from any part in this supernatural production; then the conception of Jesus did not alter the purity of her state. And thus far Scripture carries us expressly. Ver. 25.

Now this is a circumstance the more important, by reason the truth of God was concerned in it, and that it had been long before delivered as one of the distinguishing characters of the Messiah. To this purpose not Christians only, but some ancient Jews have applied that of Jeremiah, *"The Lord hath created a new thing in the earth, a woman shall compass a man*. The words, in propriety of speech, suit well with this construction: and none of theirs, who would evade it, answer at all to the solemnity of that preface, to the genius of the prophetic style, or to the strangeness of any event deserving to be termed *The Lord's creating a new thing upon the earth*. But that of *"Isaiah is yet more full and particular, and this, the Holy Ghost himself assures us, was actually fulfilled in the birth of our 'Jesus*. So that, if we are content to accept the Spirit of God for a good interpreter of prophecies dictated by himself, here can remain no reasonable doubt. For in this case we are not left to the applications of mere men, but the same Holy Ghost, who predicted so wonderful an event by the prophet, hath by the evangelist pointed out that event, explained his own meaning, and determined the prediction to our hand.

Thus a chaste virgin became a mother; thus was our *Jesus a Holy*

^a Gen. iii. 15; Gal. iv. 4.

^c Matt. i. 1; Rom. i. 3.

^p Jer. xxxi. 22.

^q Isa. vii. 14.

^r Ver. 22, 23.

Thing throughout; a high priest every way qualified for his office; as being from the very womb *harmless, undefiled, and separate from sinners*; who when he offered for the sins of the people had no need to offer first for his own. And upon that account we may depend upon the power of that sacrifice to expiate effectually the sins of others.

Thus have we, under the conduct of Scripture, taken such a view as we may of the Son of God *coming down from heaven, incarnate by the Holy Ghost of the Virgin Mary, and made man for us men and for our salvation*: and how astonishing or remote soever from the ordinary course of nature this doctrine may seem, it is yet no more than every Christian professes to believe when repeating those words daily in the Apostles' Creed, *Who was conceived by the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary*. An argument so fruitful in pious and seasonable reflections, that it would ask many discourses to mention, but no number can ever exhaust them. I will therefore conclude with adding some few more to those which have already been offered upon the like occasion.

How gloriously the power, the wisdom, the justice, the goodness of Almighty God manifested themselves in the incarnation of his blessed Son! What lively faith, what fervent love, what extensive charity, what profound humility the contemplation of this mystery ought to produce in us, hath been my endeavour to make my reader sensible of formerly. Think me not inconsistent with myself, if, from the very same mystery, I make it now my

1. First endeavour earnestly to recommend such a true greatness of soul as may incline every Christian to value himself upon this occasion much above the rate that the generality of men are wont to do. The sin of pride St. Paul hath well described by *"thinking of ourselves more highly than we ought to think"*: but yet I make no difficulty to affirm, that the not thinking of ourselves so highly as we ought to think, is one of the worst and most destructive evils we can possibly be guilty of. And as high thoughts may be qualified, and employed, and improved, it is not easy to exceed in them. For there is in all sin a meanness of spirit, and a disparagement to our nature. Which did we but rightly attend to, it were scarce possible we should submit to, much less delight in, those dispositions and habits which are the foulest blemish, the vilest debasement and reproach, that can any manner of way come upon us. Hence is that wise and useful advice of some old philosophers, that men would respect themselves, pay all due honour to the god within them, and not prostitute and enslave a noble principle of reason, so nearly allied to the Divine Spirit above, by the filthy affections of brutes. But if our being made in the likeness of God were a good argument to this purpose, how much more persuasive ought that to be of God's being made in the likeness of man! This is the ground of a much nearer and more endearing relation than ever our nature could boast of before. And, shall we dishonour such a body and soul as the Son of God made one

* Heb. vii. 26, 27.

† Epistle and Gospel for Christmas-Day.

‡ Rom. xii. 3.

with his own Divine Person, by abandoning them to those very works of the devil which *he was manifested in the flesh* on purpose to *destroy*? To sink down to the level of brutes that which was made but a little lower than the angels, is an affront to his distinguishing bounty, which gave us so honourable a station in the order of his creatures. But how unpardonable, how monstrous an indignity is it to him, who hath in some sort made us higher than the angels, by condescending to assume our nature rather than theirs, when we wallow in that mire and filthiness which even the obscenest of brutes are detested and despised for indulging! When therefore we reflect upon the honour God hath done us, let us at the same time not forget the honour upon this very account due to ourselves; let us join our endeavours to exalt the nature he bore; let us cherish a noble and generous disdain of all manner of vice, as that which both is and makes us despicable; and think it our duty, from our Lord's humility, to raise our minds up to that commendable ambition of partaking in the divine excellencies of innocence and goodness and charity, because he partook of our frailties and sufferings, and dwelt in the similitude of sinful flesh.

Especially let us remember what care the Scripture takes to observe, that in the midst of all that likeness there was one difference constantly preserved. For he that in *all points was like unto us* never was, never could be like us in one point. Mortal indeed, and tempted too as we are, but *still without sin*. And therefore he whose weaknesses and trials are our security for compassion and succour when we are tempted, hath never set us any pattern for yielding to, much less for making and courting temptations.

2. Secondly, as our Lord's incarnation should excite our zeal to aspire after all virtue in general, so may it more particularly raise our esteem of chastity and purity. Indulging *the lusts of concupiscence* is by St. Paul made a mark of *men that know not God*. But sure they must be errant strangers to Christ, and the glorious mystery we have now been treating of, who think his disciples capable of any blemish more contrary, more disgraceful to their profession, than the abandoning themselves to any sort of uncleanness. *When he took upon him to deliver man, he did not abhor the Virgin's womb*; but still it was the Virgin's. And that birth is so far acted over again in the person of every Christian, that, as there only the Holy Ghost then vouchsafed to exert his prolific power, so neither now will he endure to dwell with or shed his sanctifying graces upon any soul prostituted to filthy desires. If therefore we would invite this blessed guest to visit, to take up his residence, to set up his throne in our hearts, we must first purge those hearts, and fit up an apartment agreeable to the cleanness of the inhabitant we hope for. So absolutely inconsistent is impurity of conversation with a state of grace, or the character of a Christian: so deceitful and empty, so dangerous and deluding the most pompous appearances of piety and devotion, the

most boasted pretensions to the Spirit, while men allow themselves the liberties, and obey the affections, and practise and delight in the works of the flesh.

3. Once more. We can hardly, I should think, meditate on the manner of our Lord's incarnation with any degree of seriousness, and not feel ourselves very strongly inclined to bewail our unhappiness of original sin; that stain and guilt are a necessary part of the wretched inheritance entailed upon all Adam's posterity. And however some justly valued privileges may dispose us to entertain lofty conceits of ourselves, yet this single reflection, methinks, should more than suffice to mortify our vanity, that we are born the children of corruption and wrath. Highly expedient therefore it is to apply this antidote frequently against that pride, which above all others seems to be the reigning vice of every mind, dissembled pretty well in many, but really subdued in very few; the first that puts forth in infancy, the last that forsakes us through the whole course of our lives. And among many others, is not this matter for much humiliation, that, as valuable creatures as we fancy ourselves, yet it could not consist with the dignity of the Son of God to be created as we are? That he, who submitted to our infirmities and sufferings, would not endure the least tincture of our defilement; and though he chose to die like the vilest of men, yet he absolutely refused to be conceived and born like the very best of them? How wide a difference is there betwixt his thoughts and ours on this occasion! the afflictions, the sorrows, the pains, and the necessity of dying, which we are apt to look upon as our greatest miseries, are not, it seems, comparable to that of which we think so seldom and so slightly, that we *were shapen in wickedness, and in sin our mothers conceived us*; that we bring into the world that root of bitterness from which our after-faults and all our misfortunes spring.

This, I say, is matter of humiliation and sorrow; but, blessed be God, it is not however matter of despair. For *he hath opened a fountain for sin and for uncleanness*. The waters of baptism wash our sullied souls, and present us clean and white before God. These turn our scarlet into snow, and make our crimson wool. And though the unhappy tendencies to evil remain, and daily inconveniences arise from them; yet we are, or may be, *daily renewed by the graces of his Holy Spirit, who was born without sin to cleanse us from all sin*. The same sanctifying power which came upon the Virgin will not disdain to descend upon us too, if we imitate her meekness and modesty, her lively faith and blameless purity. The same principle of fruitfulness which enabled her to become a mother, will help us to bring forth abundantly, to conceive and bear Christ in our hearts, by becoming *fruitful in every good word and work*. It is from this Spirit alone that we are qualified to do so. But as that blessing upon her was a consequence of her believing and consenting, so our vigorous faith and diligent concurrence with this Spirit, our submitting to be acted upon and influenced by his graces, are required as necessary conditions to our sanctification. Let us then put ourselves entirely under his holy

guidance; let us consider this miracle wrought for our redemption as a powerful motive to innocency and virtue; and to our constant endeavours, let us daily (let us at this happy season especially) add our most fervent prayers, that *by the mystery of his holy incarnation, and by his holy nativity, our good Lord would deliver us.* And to these prayers may he please to say, Amen.

THE CIRCUMCISION OF CHRIST.

THE COLLECT.

ALMIGHTY God, who madest thy blessed Son ^ato be circumcised, and obedient to the law for man; Grant us the true Circumcision of the ^bSpirit; that, our hearts, and all our members, being mortified from all worldly and carnal lusts, we may in all things obey thy blessed will; through the same thy Son Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

THE EPISTLE. Rom. iv. 8.

8 *Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not impute sin.* 8. David, even while the Law was in full force, describes the blessedness of the good man, not by having no sin and paying a perfect obedience, but by having his debt released by the mercy of his creditor, and the sins he had committed not being charged to his account.

9 *Cometh this blessedness then upon the circumcision only, or upon the uncircumcision also? for we say that faith was reckoned to Abraham for righteousness.* 9. Let us see, then, who they are that are qualified for this blessedness: whether such alone as are circumcised, and so live under the law; or whether others besides them. And for a resolution of this inquiry, the case of Abraham will be of great use to us.

10 *How was it then reckoned? when he was in circumcision, or in uncircumcision? Not in circumcision, but in uncircumcision.* 10. Now the Scripture is express, that Abraham was esteemed righteous in the sight of God, upon the account and at the time of his believing the promise of God made to him. But this, it is plain, was before Abraham was circumcised.

11 *And he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith* 11, 12. You will say perhaps, that upon these terms

^a Luke ii. 21; Gal. iv. 4.

^b Rom. ii. 29; Coloss. ii. 11; iii. 5.

which he had yet being uncircumcised : that he might be the father of all them that believe, though they be not circumcised ; that righteousness might be imputed unto them also :

12 And the father of circumcision to them who are not of the circumcision only, but who also walk in the steps of that faith of our father Abraham, which he had being yet uncircumcised.

being in covenant with God. A covenant grounded, not in this rite, but in God's acceptance of that faith which was antecedent to this rite. And thus Abraham was qualified to be the father (the common pattern) of all the faithful. Of the Gentiles, or those who were never circumcised, as he had not been himself, when accepted for his faith : and of the Jews, who are his children, not by virtue of the mere sign, but by imitation of that faith and obedience signified by it.

13 For the promise, that he should be the heir of the world, was not to Abraham, or to his seed, through the law, but through the righteousness of faith.

that he should be the common father of all the blessed faithful, the heir of those privileges and blisses which he and they after him should inherit. But that faith, which was accepted and reckoned to him for righteousness at that time that promise was made ; this is the true ground upon which he then did, and all those of whom he is the reputed father must, expect the benefits contained and implied in that promise.

14 For if they which are of the law be heirs, faith is made void, and the promise made of none effect.

such only as live under and acquire a title to it by the law, the consequence will be, 1. that Abraham's faith (and in proportion that of his spiritual descendants) is of no significance at all in this matter ; which yet the Scripture positively declares to have been *counted to him for righteousness*. And, 2. that God hath not been so good as his word : for the promise was, that he should be a father of many nations, his seed as the stars of heaven, and that all families of the earth should be blessed in him. Whereas the law was given but to one family, not to the whole of his posterity, even after the flesh ; and so but one nation is blessed in him, if all who, like him, believe without the law are, notwithstanding that belief, excluded.

circumcision was a needless and an useless imposition. Not so neither. It had its uses, particularly these two.

1. It was a sign of the faith and obedience, which was the righteousness on Abraham's part, figured by it.
2. It was a visible testimony and assurance of Abraham's

13. The Law then, which was not yet in being, could not be the foundation of God's promise to Abraham,

14. It must be so. For if we suppose none to partake of this inheritance but

COMMENT.

ST. PAUL'S intention in this first part of his Epistle is to confute those doctrines which gave great disturbance to the first Christians, by urging the necessity of still adhering to the Jewish law, of depending upon that for justification and eternal life, and consequently

excluding the Gentile world from any right to or part in these benefits. In order hereunto, he hath proved, from the authority of their own Scriptures, ^cthat Jews as well as Gentiles were all under sin; therefore, that their law and the works of it were not sufficient to save them; therefore there must be some other more powerful expedient, ^dwhich, he insists, is faith; such as men might be capable of, notwithstanding they had been sinners. He proceeds to shew, that this is so far from a novel conceit, as even to have been the condition of their great ancestor's happiness: ^ethat Abraham himself, once an idolater, was esteemed righteous in virtue of this, and not for the merit of his own doings, or the unspotted innocence of his life: that the wisest and best men under the law, as well as he before it, owed their happiness to the mercy of a God remitting their sins: consequently, that the law, if necessary, could only be so as an indispensable qualification for such forgiving mercy; not as it put any into a state standing in no need of mercy.

The next thing then to be examined was, whether God had determined to extend his favour to none who were not thus qualified. And to resolve this, he appeals to the manner of his proceeding with Abraham. Whose faith being counted for righteousness before his circumcision, makes it evident that the legal rites, of which this was the initiating and the chief, are not absolutely necessary. This follows from his case, considered as a private person. But take him as the common father of the faithful, and then it will follow, that every heir of the same promise must attain it by the same method. And therefore faith, which Abraham had, must be, and the works of the law, which he had not, could not be, the condition of men's having *righteousness reckoned to them*. Which is but another word for pardon of their sins and salvation of their souls.

This is in substance the Apostle's argument. The latter part whereof concerning Abraham is very pertinently set before us, on the day sacred to the memory of that *promised seed of his, in whom all the nations of the earth are blessed*, submitting to be circumcised and so made *under the law, that he might redeem them that were under the law*. Which wise and gracious condescension that we may have the clearer understanding of, and learn our own privilege and duty consequent thereupon, three things there are fit for us to consider:

- I. First, the nature and reasons of the ordinance itself.
- II. Secondly, what it represented as necessary, not only to the persons obliged to it formerly; but even to us, who have the happiness of being exempted from it. And
- III. Thirdly, the reasons that made it convenient for Christ to submit to it.

The two former shall make the subject of my present discourse: the last will be more properly reserved for the Gospel appointed us upon this festival; and all together, improved as they ought to be, will be the best celebration of it that we are capable of.

I. First then, we will inquire briefly into the nature and reasons of this ordinance itself. What the original of it was, as to Abraham and his posterity, the first Morning Lesson gives a large and very particular account. As also, upon what persons, at what time, and upon what part of the body it was to be performed: the necessity and benefit of punctually observing, the great danger and punishment of refusing or neglecting it. And therefore, waving any needless enlargement upon particulars so very well known, I choose rather to apply myself directly to those reasons for which principally it seems to have been instituted at first, and enjoined so strictly to that race for so many succeeding generations.

I. One of these, we have little cause to doubt, was, that it might stand for a mark of distinction between the descendants of this stock and the rest of mankind. And this is so considerable, that ^bSt. Chrysostom and others insist upon it as the main ground of its being imposed upon them. To which purpose we may take notice, that the history informs us of Abraham being some time before this command called away from his country and kindred, who were, like the rest of their neighbours, idolaters; and, in obedience to that call, separating himself, not from their persons and conversation and dwelling only, but from their corrupt manners and false worship too. Into which to the intent he and his might not at any time afterwards relapse, it was thought a convenient prevention and guard for their virtue, in process of time, to forbid them promiscuous marriages, and (so far as their circumstances would allow) all manner of civil commerce with any of the heathen people round about them. And this may satisfy us why *circumcision*, as our Saviour speaks, should have been ^k*of the fathers, and not of the law*: because God had even then begun to make such a separation, and selected to himself a peculiar people, some hundreds of years before the giving of the law at Mount Sinai. This also may be a good reason for the inferences, made by some names of great authority, upon what we read in the book of ⁱJoshua; that during the Israelites' forty years sojourning in the wilderness, there was an intermission of this rite, but that it was immediately repeated again upon their entrance into the land of Canaan. The persons on whom it had passed in Egypt were dead in that long pilgrimage; and they who were born in the mean while had not yet undergone it. Not improbably, because the ground of it thus far ceased, while they were by themselves in a desolate place. But so soon as they returned into a land inhabited, a country scandalous for all manner of abominable wickedness, the danger of mingling with men of different persuasions, and of being seduced by such mixture, returning, it was requisite this note of union among themselves and of distinction from foreigners should return with it. In the observance of which this people were afterwards so exceedingly rigid and tenacious, as to render it the character of civil no less than religious communion. The privileges of commerce and friendship, and even freedom of conversation, being

^g Gen. xvii.

^h Hom. in Gen. 39, 40; Maimonides More Nev.; Gen. xii.

ⁱ Gen. xxxiv.

^k John v.

^l Josh. v; Theodoret. Masius. Spencer de Legib. Hebr.

usually imparted to aliens, as we find them to the Sichemites in particular, with an—*“only in this will we consent unto you, if ye will be as we be, that every male of you be circumcised.”*

2. Secondly. This was also a note of commemoration, to put them that bore it continually in mind whose offspring they were, and what advantages they were entitled to upon that account, provided they took care not to degenerate from the glories of that stock from whence they sprung. Now, considering that Abraham was the first we read of whom Almighty God rescued from those general corruptions in faith and manners which the world had now a second time sunk into by relapsing since the flood; considering that this person and his issue were singled out for a repository of truth, a chosen generation, a receptacle for God upon earth, and the source of his Son after the flesh; there was reason in abundance why this remembrance should be very grateful to them. And apt enough, it is plain, upon all occasions they were to value themselves upon so particular an honour. The rest of mankind we find them holding at distance and in great contempt, branding them with the reproachful name of *the uncircumcision*, making great boast of Abraham's seed, and much account of the covenant struck with him. But the most useful part of this reflection was too commonly overlooked,—the eminent faith and ready obedience of so renowned an ancestor, and the noble emulation of his virtues which such a pattern ought to have inspired. It is therefore that a behaviour unworthy the descendants of such a father is so often charged upon them; therefore, that they are reproached with a vain presumption of their blood alone recommending them. *“Think not,”* says the Baptist, *to say within yourselves, We have Abraham to our father, that is, while yourselves are no better than serpents, and a generation of vipers.* And our blessed Saviour in like manner, *“If ye were Abraham's children, ye would do the works of Abraham.”* To the same effect it is that St. Paul here insists that Abraham's faith moved God to engage in such liberal promises to him and his posterity; that the covenant was a consequence of his piety, and circumcision a confirmation of that covenant; and that the only relation to him which could stand any man in stead, is not that of consanguinity and natural descent, but the resemblance of his virtues, and claiming under him as father of the faithful. These are the things proper for circumcision to have suggested; and thus it was their honour and advantage; a monument of favour which did set that race above the world in common, and a powerful incitement to those qualifications which distinguished and capacitated him for such peculiar grace.

3. Hence it is sufficiently manifest, in the third place, that circumcision was a sign of inward virtue, and intended to figure some particular dispositions of the mind which bore proportion to the outward ceremony, and were required for rendering it effectual. But because the shewing what these are in particular hath been already propounded for the subject of my second general head, I shall reserve them for that place, and proceed to consider it.

4. Fourthly. Not only as a sign, but a seal too. For so St. Paul expressly terms it here, *a seal of the righteousness of faith*. Now this is a term naturally referring us to mutual contracts, and accordingly we find it, at the first institution, styled *a covenant*, and *a token of the covenant of God in their flesh*. My endeavour therefore shall be to explain in few words how fitly it was chosen for that purpose, what it ratified on God's part, and what it implied on man's.

The promises of God were to this effect: that he would bless Abraham and his seed after him with numerous increase and wonderful successes^r; that he would bestow upon them the land of Canaan, admit them into an everlasting covenant with himself, and that *in his seed all the families of the earth should be blessed*. Now the commanding circumcision, as a memorial of this covenant, was the strongest confirmation imaginable of these promises. For this was a character hardly to be supposed possible to grow into use by men's own choice, or for any other reason but purely in obedience to an appointment of God: it did not only distinguish them from, but rendered them despicable in the eyes of most other nations and professions. And it was a mark as indelible as it was particular. Consequently they and all the world must easily discern whether God were really as good as his word or not. For by appointing all of that race to use it for such a purpose, there could be no confusion in after ages, no dispute who was or was not *a child of Abraham*, and *an heir according to promise*. This ratification every man carried about in his own person, and they who did not were sufficiently informed of it. Neither the thing nor the occasion of it was a secret; and consequently neither could the answering or the disappointing those expectations raised by it be any. So that this progeny had the firmest grounds of assurance. For no man can have greater dependance upon truth and justice, than for the party with whom he deals to give such a pledge of both as must needs betray itself, and raise a witness in judgment against him, which cannot fail to publish his falsehood to all the world, if he should happen to be guilty of it.

Thus did it seal God's part, and the counterpart on man's was likewise testified by the same expedient. For by this they engaged to be his people, to forsake idolatry, and to worship and obey the true God only. Of all which this was a very significant indication in opposition to those obscene deities and bestial rites that made up a great part of the Pagan religion. And to shew that the signification of the rite was not confined to the renouncing of false gods, but extended to the whole of their duty, it was used and interpreted afterwards for the initiating ceremony into the obedience of the whole Levitical institution. Hence it is that the apostles complain of it as a *yoke*, which neither they nor their fathers were able to bear. Not that circumcision was or could be such singly and by itself, but only upon the account of its consequences, the long train and heavy burthen of ceremonies it drew after it, and the rigour of that sentence which this

^p Ver. 11. ^q Gen. xvii. 10, 11, 13.

^r Gen. xii. xv. xvii.

^s Acts xv. 10.

one act concluded them under. Hence being *circumcised after the manner of Moses*, and being *circumcised and keeping the law*, are used as terms equivalent. Hence St. Paul argues against it so warmly: "*Behold, I Paul say unto you, that if ye be circumcised, Christ shall profit you nothing. For I testify again to every man that is circumcised, that he is a debtor to do the whole law.*"

Circumcision then to the Jews was plainly of the same importance in this respect with baptism now to Christians. A sacrament of initiation to the service of God, a holy engagement to believe and do as he had revealed and commanded. The substance of the thing engaged for was then indeed sometimes more and sometimes less; but thus much was common to all times, that it contracted for an universal compliance with and obedience to whatever God had made obligatory to the men of that present time.

And the token of this, in respect of men, was highly convenient also. They could not evade it, they could not conceal it. The remembrances of their duty were always present, and their law had so deep a concern in it, that the very life and soul and substance of Judaism seems to have consisted in circumcision. Without this they were aliens and strangers in right, though children in blood. The person undergoing it was for that day called *the spouse*, to intimate his marriage then to God. This made them Israelites in privilege, and was contrived to make them *Israelites indeed*. Nor were the weighty constructions put upon it additional inventions of superstitious men; but God himself designed it for such mutual stipulations, and accordingly declared to Abraham at the very first appointment, "*This is my covenant which ye shall make between me and you, and thy seed after thee.*" And hence, I presume, they argue very reasonably who have concluded this to be an expedient for removing the guilt of original sin then, in proportion to what baptism doth now; the part on which this rite is exercised being probably thought to intimate thus much. But waving that farther than this short hint, it seems pretty plain from the reason of the thing. For the nature of covenants with God is, to put men's future fate upon the issue of their future fidelity in performing what they contract for. And therefore all former quarrels must be taken up, all old debts cancelled, before men can be in a condition of indenting afresh with him. A covenant state implies favour and friendship, a good understanding, and a clear account; such as forgives and imputes no past trespasses, unless some subsequent forfeiture cast the man back again, and, by repeated acts of enmity, raise up the otherwise forgotten provocations in judgment against him.

Much more might be spoken concerning this first head. But I confine myself the rather, because it explains an ordinance so far from necessary now, that it is even unlawful and destructive. Yet something there lies couched under it, which hath not yet lost nor ever can lose its obligation. The Collect for this day hath instructed

^t Acts xv. 1 and 24.

^u Gal. v. 2, 3.

^x Gen. xvii. 10.

us to pray for *the true circumcision of the Spirit*; and therefore my subject is far from having justice done it till diligent attention hath been paid to my

II. Second head; which promised to consider what this rite represented as necessary, not only to the persons formerly using it, but to us also, who have the happiness of being exempted from the carnal ordinance itself, and all the servile consequences of it.

That a great deal of this kind was always intended, and that men at no time ought to have rested in the external act alone, is manifest beyond all controversy from the writings of the Old Testament. Hence it was that Moses commanded the Israelites to *circumcise the foreskin of their heart, and be no more stiffnecked*. In agreement whereunto St. Stephen calls the obstinate Jews *uncircumcised in heart and ears*; and adds the reason of his reproaching them in those terms, *Ye do always resist the Holy Ghost*. Hence is it predicted as a blessing of Israel's best days, *The Lord thy God will circumcise thy heart, and the heart of thy seed, to love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul*. And though, at the first covenant with Abraham, the threatening ran thus, *The uncircumcised man-child, whose flesh of his foreskin is not circumcised, that soul shall be cut off from his people*; yet, it seems, removing the flesh alone was not security sufficient. For thus God expresses himself by Jeremiah, *Circumcise yourselves to the Lord, and take away the foreskin of your heart, ye men of Judah and inhabitants of Jerusalem, lest my fury come forth like fire, and burn that none can quench it, because of your evil doings*. So certain it is, even from this people's own testimonies, which St. Paul in this Epistle hath urged them with upon this occasion, that *he is not a Jew which is one outwardly, neither is that circumcision which is outward in the flesh: but he is a Jew which is one inwardly, and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter, whose praise is not of men but of God*.

The texts here alleged do plainly evince that there is an inward circumcision required; that this is the most material, the most acceptable, the only effectual one. Not only so, but they in great measure describe it to us, and save us the labour of seeking any farther for a just notion of the thing. For, from these put together, it is easy to see the substance of it comprised in the three following particulars:

I. The first is, a readiness and willing disposition to know the will of God, and to submit to it when known. This I collect from that exhortation of Moses, *Circumcise the foreskin of your heart, and be no more stiffnecked*, joined with the reproof of St. Stephen, who calls the Jews *uncircumcised in heart and ears*, by reason of their inflexible opposition to the doctrine of our blessed Saviour and his apostles.

Now candour and ingenuity of temper, giving our teachers a patient hearing, examining what they would persuade us to fairly, without partiality and prepossession, allowing every argument its just weight, yielding to the convictions of truth, so as to assent with our under-

^y Deut. x. 16.

^z Acts vii. 51.

^a Deut. xxx. 6.

^b Gen. xvii. 14.

^c Jer. iv. 4.

^d Rom. ii. 28, 29.

^e Deut. x. 16.

^f Acts vii. 51.

standing and will, and to make what we understand and believe the constant rule and measure of our practice; these are moral duties, of eternal and indispensable obligation. All professions of men, all dispensations of religion, are and must be bound under them. Sincerity and modesty and meekness ever were and ever will be virtues. Faction and fierceness, perverseness and obduration of mind against God and his ministers, always will be vices. The former have a rectitude, the latter an obliquity in their nature which cannot be changed. The foreskin then to be taken away, in this sense, is all that prejudice and self-conceit, all that carnal or worldly reasoning, which obstructs the efficacy of truth upon our hearts and lives. For want of this circumcision, the Jews, who had the covenant in the flesh, were yet out of it as to its real advantages and spiritual importance. And without the same, the Christian, who disowns and disdains all marks of Judaism upon his body, is yet, in spirit, and to all the purposes of sin and reprobation, an errant Jew still.

2. Secondly, this true circumcision of the spirit imports the weaning ourselves from the world, and settling our affections upon God and goodness. Thus much I infer from that other passage of Moses, *The Lord thy God shall circumcise thy heart, that thou mayest love the Lord thy God with all thy heart and with all thy soul.* So that, in this respect, *the first and great commandment*, as our Saviour calls it, the foundation and the substance, the beginning and the complement of the whole moral law, was shadowed in and contained under this most significant ordinance. And indeed not improperly; since the retrenching our desires and enjoyments in things temporal is the only expedient for raising up our minds to worthy ideas of things eternal. For *God and mammon cannot dwell together.* Each will engross the whole breast to himself; and that heart can never be in heaven which is not first persuaded, that its treasure, its best and only treasure, is there. Covetousness and injustice, worldly mindedness and vanity, luxury and love of pleasure, straitness of hand and heart, and unmercifulness to the poor and distressed; in a word, all those corrupt principles and dispositions, which argue that we do not love God, or that we do not love him better than the world, or that we do not love our neighbour for his sake, are so many sure symptoms of an *uncircumcised* spirit. These then must be pared off and cast away. And the pious, the devout, the strictly honest, the cheerfully liberal, the tender and compassionate, the kind and condescending Christians, they only are the seed of Abraham, they only heirs of the covenant made to that glorious father of the faithful.

3. Thirdly, this circumcision of the spirit does yet more immediately denote a strict guard and government over ourselves; reservedness even in the lawful pleasures of sense, and a total abstinence from and abhorrence of all manner of scandalous lewdness and debauchery in conversation. Thus much is plain from that of *Jeremiah*, where the *foreskin of the Jews' heart* is explained by *the evil of their doings*; and

this again described in the chapter next following, by *committing adultery, assembling by troops in harlots' houses, being as fed horses in the morning, every one neighing after his neighbour's wife*. It is obvious indeed to any who considers at all what circumcision was, that the subduing of sensual and lascivious inclinations must needs have been meant by it. This is the very first thought that offers itself, and was no doubt one of the chief ends designed by it.

No man then fulfils the spiritual intent of that law now but the sober, the regular, the chaste, the mortified Christian. He that subdues his body and brings it into subjection, that curbs his appetites sharply, and keeps a strait rein over his passions. And though this, like the circumcision in the flesh, be painful, yet done it must be, and that early too. No man in this case can begin too soon, because no man can be in covenant with God and Christ upon other terms. *Our hearts and all our members must be mortified from all worldly and carnal lusts, before we can obey his blessed will*. So that, as great an undertaking as this may appear, it is yet in truth but a preparation to goodness; it is not the whole of our duty, but the putting us into a capacity and readiness for it. *"The superfluity of naughtiness must be laid apart, before we can receive the engrafted word with meekness*. And some have supposed a peculiar elegance in that expression of St. James, as alluding to circumcision in particular. However that be, the resemblance is so far good, that God requires men to part only with superfluities in both cases. When he bids us be willing to learn and to believe, he does not command us to be blindly implicit or foolishly credulous, but only means that we should be considerate and just judges of true and false, of good and evil. When he calls men's affections off from the world, he does not deny them an honest concern or a decent use of it, but forbids their making this their whole or their principal study and delight. When he denounces war against our lusts, he does not debar us of necessary recreations, nor condemn the pleasures that are moderate and innocent. And thus far every man is obliged to set bounds to himself. Every Christian hath indeed done it already in that baptism which the Apostle hath therefore most emphatically styled, *"the circumcision made without hands, and putting off the body of the sins of the flesh*. This and nothing less can make it possible to profit by Him who vouchsafed to be *circumcised and obedient to the law for man*. The reasons and benefits of which condescension the Gospel for this day will in the next place lead me to consider.

In the mean while, if it may become us to suppose one time fitter than another for taking pains with ourselves in order to the acquiring or cherishing or perfecting the good dispositions I have been pressing, when can the good work more seasonably be set about than on this very day? the day that opens, as it were, a fresh scene of life, by letting us into a new year. But well it were, if the rejoicings usual upon this account were mingled with seriousness and prudent re-

¹ Chap. v. 7, 8.

^m James i. 21.

ⁿ Coloss. ii. 11.

flection, such as might render these revolutions of time matter of solid and unreprouvable joy to us. For surely this would either check our joy, if the wickedness of those already spent amiss, and none of the succeeding better than the former, do justly reproach us, or make us careful that those yet to come (if any be yet to come) may not have occasion to reproach us any more. When this is taken care of, and men live like those that must give an account, then are these lengthenings out of life a matter of thanks and joy, because the more service we pay, the greater reward we shall be sure to receive. But let us not mock ourselves with these solemnities; nor think, because the sun is now at the point he was a twelvemonth since, that we are so too. No, very far from that. The state of our account is greatly altered, and we are so much nearer being called upon to give it up. How many, even within the narrow compass of our own acquaintance, who were then as healthful, as gay, as liberal as vain in promising themselves many years, as we perhaps are now, have yet been called to give up their account already! And were none of these equal to us in the advantages of age and strength? Were all sick and old and feeble, that they should be taken and we left? Think with yourselves a little; and let that thought instruct you whether you ought to depend so very much upon finishing that year which you are now beginning; whether you ought not therefore so to begin it, as to resolve that it shall be a new year to you, in the most Christian and beneficial sense. Surely we owe this to the distinguishing providence of God, whose *forbearance and longuffering and goodness*, expressed in our *preservation*, call for the thanks of living to his glory. Surely we owe it to ourselves, who else do but inflame our reckoning, and *treasure up to ourselves wrath against the day of wrath*, if, as we draw nearer, so we do not take care to be fitter for death and judgment. I conclude therefore with that of the Apostle, *Let the time past of our life suffice to have wrought the will of the Gentiles, when we walked in lasciviousness, lusts, excess of wine, revellings, banquetings, and the like.* But for the days which God of his mercy permits us to see hereafter, let us (and Lord give us grace that we may!) so *number* them as to *apply our hearts unto wisdom*—that wisdom which is from above, and seeks those things that are above, the things that shall endure when weeks and months and years shall be no more; even an *inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for us.* Of which God in his infinite mercy and at his own due time make us all partakers, for the sake of the Son of his love, Christ Jesus our Lord: to whom, with the Father and Holy Spirit, be all honour and glory henceforth and for evermore. Amen.

THE GOSPEL. St. Luko ii. 15.

15 *And it came to pass, as the angels were gone away from them into heaven, the* 15. The hymn of praise being ended, the angels were

shepherds said one to another, Let us now go even unto Bethlehem, and see this thing which is come to pass, which the Lord hath made known unto us. seen to return back up to heaven, and then the shepherds invited and encouraged each other to go see this wonderful thing which they concluded the angel had by God's command related to them.

15 *And they came with haste, and found Mary, and Joseph, and the babe lying in a manger.* 16, 17. Accordingly they came forthwith, and found all things just as the angel had described. Whereby they were not only convinced themselves, but published to others the whole matter, and what the angel had declared to them

17 *And when they had seen it, they made known abroad the saying which was told them concerning this child.* 18. The condition of these

18 *And all they that heard it wondered at those things which were told them by the shepherds.* relators not rendering them suspected of inventing a lie, the relation they gave of the thing filled all that heard it with wonder.

19 *But Mary kept all these things, and pondered them in her heart.* 19. His mother in the meanwhile contemplated these things silently, comparing them one with another, and observing how wisely God ordered them all.

20 *And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things that they had heard and seen, as it was told unto them.* 20. But the shepherds went back to their flocks full of thanks to God, and joyful at the exact agreement they found between what they saw and what the angel had said.

21 *And when eight days were accomplished for the circumcising of the child, his name was called JESUS, which was so named of the angel before he was conceived in the womb.* 21. On the eighth day, as the law appointed, the child was circumcised; and then (according to custom) he was named Jesus; which name was not chosen by his mother or Joseph, but particularly directed by the angel, who was sent from God to the virgin to foretell and prepare her for his incarnation.

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COMMENT.

FROM the consideration of circumcision in general, for which the Epistle of this day ministered occasion, I am now brought, by the Gospel, to observe it as a rite which passed upon our blessed Saviour in particular. But before we enter upon the points proper to be insisted on upon that occasion, it may not be amiss to say how the account of this matter given us in the close of this Scripture proves that our Lord was actually circumcised. For the words as they stand in our English translation might be so interpreted, as only to import our blessed Saviour's receiving the name of Jesus at the same

distance of time from his birth which was the usual and appointed day for Jewish children to be circumcised upon; and so, as not necessarily to determine whether this name were given him with that rite or without it.

But here it is to be observed, that the original language reads a conjunction which ours hath omitted. The verse then strictly and literally runs thus, *When eight days were accomplished for the circumcising of the child, and his name was called Jesus, &c.* Which particule *and* is not perhaps wholly superfluous, as some critics and our translators have esteemed it, but rather very significant, and by an *ellipsis*, in which the Greek tongue is known to abound, implies the repetition of the foregoing verb, and may be thus supplied: *When eight days were accomplished for the circumcising of the child, and he was circumcised, his name was called Jesus.*

Such brevity is the more excusable in the present case, because the thing was abundantly notorious, that the Jews of those and former ages did always name their children at the time of circumcising them; that they never imposed names solemnly upon males but at that time; and that they durst not do it without the use of circumcision. Of this the ⁴ Evangelist had just before mentioned a famous instance in the case of John the Baptist; of this, with regard to our Lord, St. Paul hath left sufficient intimation, when declaring him to be *made under the law*, that is, to have submitted to its ordinances. Which he did not by any means if this so very important ordinance were not performed upon him in such time and manner as the law directs.

Thus much being premised, to show what reason we have, even from the text before us, to satisfy ourselves that our Lord was really circumcised, I now apply myself to observe from hence,

I. First, the reasons for which it was convenient he should be so;

II. Secondly, the importance of the name given to him when he was so; and

III. Thirdly, the time when both these things were done.

1. Under my first head, which assigns the reasons why it was convenient for our blessed Lord to be circumcised, I might enlarge on great variety. But it will be sufficient to insist on those which seem to be the principal, and such as are nearest allied to those uses attributed in my last discourse to circumcision in general.

1. Look upon this then, first, as a mark of distinction, and thus it became Jesus to be circumcised, that he might qualify himself the better for acceptance and free conversation with the Jews. The very mingling with men that were otherwise was esteemed a pollution. And accordingly we find St. Peter, when coming to Cornelius and his company, making this apology for himself: ** Ye know how that it is an unlawful thing for a man that is a Jew to keep company, or come unto one of another nation; but God hath shewed me that I should not call any man common or unclean.* Now, that this uncleanness did not proceed

merely from foreignness of birth is evident, not only from the constant practice of receiving persons of any nation whatsoever into all the rights of natives, when submitting to this rite, but also from the terms of the accusation brought against St. Peter upon this account. For they who *contended with him* said, *Thou wentest into men uncircumcised, and didst eat with them.* Reproach and scorn, and a haughty distance, was the treatment such persons had to expect. And therefore Timothy was *"taken and circumcised by St. Paul, because of the Jews that were in those quarters,* to render his ministry acceptable among them. The errand then, upon which Christ came to his own countrymen, had been absolutely lost; no audience at all given to it, no opportunities allowed of preaching or conferring publicly, nay, not even of eating and drinking, and insinuating himself in private conversation. For, had not this ceremony passed upon him, they would, agreeably to their own principles for disregarding it, have shunned a man whose only business with them was to instruct and convert them to the truth.

Thus hath our blessed Master set us all a pattern of being well content to put ourselves under some hardships and restraints, which are not necessary upon our own accounts, when we foresee, that these will help forward the good of others, and bring us into a condition of doing their souls service. And even great things should not be declined which will gain us access to the hearts of our brethren, render our advice more prevailing, our company upon religious accounts more agreeable, and the wholesome truths we labour to instil better heard, more kindly taken, and consequently more successfully considered. As certainly they will, as oft as any prejudice, known to lie against the person attempting to persuade, is first removed out of the way.

2. Secondly. As circumcision was a commemorative sign of Abraham and the covenant made with him, so was it likewise highly requisite for Christ to undergo it. Of him was that most glorious of all promises to Abraham intended, *"In thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed.* Which made it fit the world should have this testimony also, of his being truly and rightly descended from that ancestor. The privileges granted in that covenant made the patriarch, from whom they were derived down, the glory and boast of his posterity. And when the mediator of a better covenant came, the former however was to recede with honour; and that it might do so, his own example approved a sacrament of his Father's institution by taking it upon his own person. So certifying that this, as things then stood, was the proper method of recommending men to the favour and blessing of God, and the rights of the covenant-state.

So many, and indeed sundry more circumstances concur to render the circumcision of Christ reasonable; as, an addition of honour to the ordinance of God, and a firmer establishment of their minds, who, though about to be released from it, yet came over to the faith, from

^t Acts xi. 2, 3.

^u Acts xvi. 3.

^x Gal. iii. 16.

a profession which had subjected them to and taught them to depend upon the use it, as a proof of the truth of God, and a confirmation of the benefits originally indented for with the father of the blessed seed.

But that is not all. The evidence of his being the son of Abraham, even in a larger and looser sense, was necessary; I mean, the making it appear that he was very man. For, as the race of which he came must be made clear to the Jews, who were long ago warned to expect a Messiah of the seed of Abraham, the tribe of Judah, and the house and lineage of David; so must the substance of his human nature, to silence the perverseness of some ancient heretics, who will not allow him of any line at all. These men (so wild and extravagant is error) contended that the Word of God appeared only as man, and in that form taught and did miracles. Now this opinion one would think abundantly prevented, it is at least sufficiently confuted, by the single act we are upon. For that could never be performed upon an empty form. Flesh and blood only was in condition to be wounded by a knife; a shadow could neither bleed nor be cut away: and this proves the reality of his human body.

But still, this particular proof of it was not equally necessary to all, because all did not stand obliged to this ceremony: many other actions and sufferings of his life argued the truth of his humanity, and therefore this had a farther end. For the choosing this method, and submitting to circumcision at a regular time, and as a religious rite, was a proof of his consanguinity to that generation of men who made this a solemn part of their worship. Any cutting and bleeding would have proved him the son of man, but this cutting and bleeding only could have any force for proving him the son of that man of whose seed the Christ was promised to come.

3. Thirdly. As circumcision was a seal of a mutual covenant, in this respect also it was expedient for Christ to be circumcised. Not upon his own personal account indeed, but for the sake of others, whose persons he came to represent, and whose cause he undertook. Thus much we acknowledge in the Collect for this festival, when saying, that *Almighty God made his blessed Son to be circumcised and obedient to the law for man*. He had no sin of his own to be done away, but, by doing the same penance with those that had, he declared the efficacy of this ordinance to all the faithful who then applied it for that purpose. As God, he was superior to and could not be bound by this his own law: but the figure now to be made was that of a man; and, as such, he was born within the limits where it obtained, and subjected himself to the voluntary observance of it.

Again. That whole law, so far forth as it was a carnal commandment, he came to abolish; but before its abolition it must be fulfilled. And because this never had been, never could be done strictly and punctually by any other, he did it in the behalf of them who failed in the performance. The sentence of the curse continued in full force till some person appeared on whom it could take no hold. And therefore, by this initiating ceremony, he contracted for a perfect

obedience; and he, of all that had contracted, was the single person that made his engagement good. Thus, getting above the law, he supplied the defects of his brethren; and, in virtue of his own unblemished righteousness, introduced a gentler and more practicable condition, by exchanging the righteousness of works for that of faith. So St. Paul, *Now I say that Jesus Christ was a minister of the circumcision for the truth of God, to confirm the promises made unto the fathers.* Upon which words St. Chrysostom hath the following reflection, very apposite to the subject we are handling:

“The promise was made to Abraham, but all his progeny rendered themselves obnoxious to punishment. For the transgression of the law brought wrath upon them, and overthrew all claim to the promise of the fathers. The Son therefore came, and compounded the matter with the Father, so as that those promises should be made good, and obtain their intended effect. For he, by fulfilling the whole law, and particularly circumcision, did both by this and by his cross, deliver from the curse consequent upon the transgression, and so kept the promise from falling to the ground. The Apostle therefore, when styling him the *minister of circumcision*, means thus much. That he, by coming and fulfilling the whole law, by being circumcised and the seed of Abraham, took off the curse, appeased the wrath of God, and rendered them who were thus delivered from their offences capable of receiving the promise of the future. Thus he turns the argument back upon them who urge the circumcision of Christ and his observance of the law, to prove that it ought to continue and must still oblige. For in effect he reasons thus. All this was done, not that the law might stand, but that he might take it away, deliver thee from the curse then hanging over thee, and from thenceforth set thee perfectly at large from its dominion. Thy having transgressed and fallen short of the law was the reason why he fulfilled it. But this he did, not with an intent that thou shouldst fulfil it after him; but that he might secure to thee the promises made to the fathers, which the law had defeated by convicting thee of sin, and proving thee unworthy of the inheritance. So that thou also, O Jew, art saved through grace, for thy condition too was lost without it.” So this admirable interpreter.

Thus the Son of God submitted in great humility to the same mortifying remedies with common men; and his goodness was content to suffer that upon the account of others, which was in no degree necessary upon his own. He hath asserted our liberty by this voluntary bondage, and, by bearing a yoke much too heavy for any neck but his, hath taken it effectually off from ours. Thus did he begin to save us as soon as he was born, and shed the first fruits of his blood for men immediately after his receiving it. So truly was he our Jesus, so well deserving that name, who became such from the very moment of his being called so. The reason and importance whereof is my

II. Second head. *His name was called Jesus*, says the text, and so named he was of the angel before he was conceived in the womb. We read but of few instances in Scripture, where men had names determined for them by particular appointment from heaven, and before the time of their birth. And as such names appear to have been very significant, so the persons distinguished by them were always remarkable for some very extraordinary qualities or events, which their respective names were ²designed to denote. This observation was in no case made good so conspicuously as in that now before us. Our Lord's name is indeed in sense and substance the same with Joshua, that famous leader heretofore, who after the death of Moses settled the Israelites in their promised land, and subdued their enemies, who opposed their entrance into it. But as that earthly was a figure of the heavenly Canaan, so was the captain of that an eminent type of the Captain of our salvation. And if he was worthy to be called a saviour, much more is this Jesus what his name imports. For he delivers from the heaviest of all bondages, from the most formidable of all enemies; as he, and he only it is, who *saves his people from their sins*.

To understand and value as we ought the greatness of this salvation, we must be sensible of the greatness of our danger and misery without it. And this we may quickly be, by a short recollection of the dismal consequences of sin unpardoned and unconquered.

By this then men offend against a righteous law, they go against their interest and their duty, they provoke a holy and a just God, they contract a deep guilt wound their own consciences, stir up the wrath of an Avenger, whose power enables him and whose truth obliges him to punish their disobedience with inexpressible and everlasting torments both of body and soul. By sin they defile their nature and debauch their principles, bring themselves under the tyranny of their unruly passions and vicious habits; and, as every act of this kind repeated adds to their guilt, so does it bind them faster in their slavery, put it more out of their power to shake off their chains, and heap up a greater portion of wrath against the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God.

Now all these dreadful consequences our blessed Saviour did, and he alone could, deliver us from. The guilt and stain of our sins he washed away by his blood; the punishment due to them he released by becoming our sacrifice, and suffering in our stead; the anger of God he hath thus appeased, and reconciled us to his once displeased Father; the power of sin he subdues by his grace, by the doctrines of his Gospel enlightening, by the assistance of his Spirit strengthening and influencing our minds, by all those means and wise methods, in short, which were necessary for our condition. By all indeed that are proper for it; all that our weak and wretched circumstances wanted, who are but men, frail, corrupt, sinful creatures; all that our circum-

² Solomon, 1 Chron. xxii. 9, 10: Josiah, 1 Kings xiii. 2: Cyrus, Isa. xlv. 1, 4: John Baptist, Luke i. 13, 17.

stances would bear, remembering that we still are men, free and rational creatures.

For as it was before in Israel's temporal deliverance, that though effected by the conduct of Joshua, and the wonderful blessing of God upon his undertakings, yet had the people too their part in it, and, by obeying his orders and fighting their own battles, were instrumental in their own deliverance; so is it here. This Jesus is our leader; he leads us out to war, he issues out his orders, and assigns to us our respective posts. And it is our part to follow, to obey, to fight under him; to watch and guard against the common foe, to use the weapons he puts into our hands, and so to work out our own salvation. He hath done all that for us which we could not do for ourselves, but what we can do is still left upon our hands. Yet so left, that provided we be willing, he will make us able to do it. In one word, he saves his people from their sins; but still they are *his people* whom he saves; them that believe his word, obey his precepts, devote themselves to his service, and desire and endeavour so far as in them lies to save themselves from them. Less than this had he done, he had not filled the importance of his name; and more had defeated the design of it. For to save those from punishment who are still fond of the guilt, had not been to take away, but rather to promote the dominion and encourage the practice of sin;—a design unworthy of God, unprofitable to man, and by no means agreeable to the tenor of his Gospel, to the nature of a covenant in general, or to the glorious privileges set forth in that most blessed name of Jesus. He would but half have saved us, had he not provided for our holiness here, as well as our happiness hereafter; and made the one, as attainable, so necessary too, in order to the other. And hence it is, that the temper of this salvation is represented to us in that prophetic song of Zacharias, by *being delivered from our enemies, that we might serve him without fear, in holiness and righteousness before him all the days of our life.*

Certain it is, that this adorable name is a name of peace and love, of comfort and joy, to all on whom the power of it takes place. But in regard all are not Israel that are of Israel; nor every one who calls himself a Christian an actual partaker of the blessings of God in Christ; it will concern us all to see and know whether the mercies implied in this name have had their proper effect and influence upon us. If then the covetous man be not saved from his avarice and hardheartedness, nor the drunkard from his riot and revelling, nor the lascivious and unclean from his lewdness, nor the peevish from his spirit of contention, nor the revengeful from his malice, nor the proud from vanity and ambition, nor the profuse from his unprofitable extravagance, nor the profane from his reproaches and contempt of religion; to be short, if men continue in sins unrepented of; if they love and like the fault, how much soever they abhor and dread the shame or the punishment; if they encourage, entice, persuade, harden

others in sin by their discourse or by their examples; to every such man our blessed Lord is no Jesus at all, nor does there any one of the innumerable benefits implied in that charming word belong to him. But to the penitent sinner, to the devout worshipper, to the just and honest dealer, to the bountiful almsgiver, to the sober and the pure, to the meek and the peaceable, to the humble and the mortified Christian; to the diligent worker out of his own, and the zealous promoter of other men's salvation; the safety and defence, the support and the joy of a Jesus to them is unconceivable. Because they feel already his powerful operation on their hearts; they know that temptations cannot hurt where he shields, nor sins condemn where he pardons, nor adversity oppress where he sustains, nor death or devils drive to despair where he, who is the resurrection and the life, hath given the pledges of his love and earnest of life everlasting. Let us then labour, and let us pray with all our might, that it may never be our condemnation to perish in the midst of succours; to refuse and neglect a salvation which courts us to accept it; to defeat all that hath been done for us; to take a name into our mouths of such heavenly importance in itself, yet of no significance to us. But do thou, blessed Jesus, help us to answer ours, as thou hast and always wilt answer thy character; that we may be thy redeemed, thy people, thy saved from our sins; and thou our refuge and trust, our hope and our joy, our all that we can have or hope for; to all intents our Jesus. In every trying circumstance, in every sorrowful hour, in the temptations of youth, in the decays of age, in the languishings of sickness, in the agonies of death, and in the terrors of judgment; in these we are undone without thee, from these none can save us besides thee, and from them all we know thou canst, thou wilt save us, if thou do but in mercy begin the good work at present in our hearts, and save us from our sins.

III. It remains now, in the last place, that I speak to the particular time both of circumcising and naming our Lord, said here to be *when eight days were accomplished*. Of which very briefly.

By *eight days being accomplished* is certainly intended the eighth day being come. Of which, as we have other passages of like importance, so have we the direction of the law to assure us. The parallel places may satisfy us, that *on the eighth day, after eight days, and eight days accomplished*, are terms exactly equivalent; the letter of the law is express in limiting the time for this ceremony; not allowing it sooner; not forgiving the omission of it longer. And much surely need not be said to persuade your belief of the law being in this case punctually observed in all its circumstances by Him whose compliance with the substance was an act of free choice, and who intended to leave no part undone which was required of them whom he came to release from it.

The reasons of fixing this precise time learned men have been much divided about. But among their several conjectures, (for they are no

^b Matt. xvi. 21; Mark x. 31; Matt. xxvii. 63; xxviii. 1; John xix. 31, 42. xx. 1; Acts ii. 1, 15; Gen. xvii; Levit. xii.

better,) not any seems more probable than that which ascribes it to taking the first opportunity after a new-born child could be supposed capable of enduring so painful an operation, and before the parent's affection was too strong to expose his offspring to the anguish of it. And all this seems likewise to agree very well with a custom, almost universal in the world, of devoting infants of every country and persuasion very early to the service, and commending them to the protection of the deity they worshipped. Of which, to mention no more, the *offering sons and daughters unto devils*, and making children *pass through the fire*, so giving them to *Moloch*, are famous instances upon record in Scripture.

As evident it is that, not only with the Jews in circumcision, but with other nations at the performance of the ceremonies last observed, a particular name was imposed. Not only as a distinguishing character for civil convenience, but especially upon a religious account, that the fellow professors might know their new proselytes, and that the party himself, by this constant memorial, might be continually reminded of and quickened in the engagements entered into at the solemn receiving of it.

I ought to add also, that, as our Lord's own name had, so the generality of pious and sober persons have always thought it decent that the names imposed upon these occasions should have somewhat significant in them. Whence, among Christians, it hath grown into a very commendable custom to make choice of those names, which either Scripture or undoubted history hath assured us had the honour to be borne by men and women of conspicuous piety and virtue. That so these examples might inspire a noble emulation of their good qualities and actions, or else reproach us if we degenerate from the patterns of those bright saints, whose lives and deaths stamped such a value on their memory as to transmit their names to and make them coveted by posterity.

The only use I desire to improve this head to at present is, to applaud, and earnestly to recommend the care of dedicating our children to our Lord and Master in holy baptism with the first convenience of doing it. The benefits of this practice are more than can, the objections against it weaker than need be insisted on. Let it suffice to say, that circumcision was as much a covenant heretofore as baptism is now; that what God then expressly ordained for them, he cannot be supposed to disapprove with us; for is he the God of the infants of the Jews, and is he not so of the Christians? Can this be thought so much a better and more gracious covenant, supposing it to exclude so many millions of souls which the former readily received, nay, peremptorily demanded? And is it not enough that these are not positively refused, to satisfy us that, though the ordinance be changed, yet the subjects and privileges of it continue still the same? Why then do any of us undertake to make the gate yet straiter, to shut up the mercies and lessen the family of God? Why represent the blessed

Jesus less kind than Moses? No, let us rather lose no moment's time of impressing upon our offspring the marks of the new covenant; let us make the best reparation we can for the stain and guilt we convey to them, by seeing this immediately washed off in *that fountain opened* by Jesus Christ *for sin and for uncleanness*, even the laver of regeneration, the sacrament of baptism. Let us deliver them up to his care who is gracious to all ages, and cannot but embrace and adopt the tender innocence of those who are propounded as a pattern for all that enter into his kingdom. And are those, to whom all that enter in must be like, not capable of entering in themselves? This happy prevention will be their security against the power of the enemy and the seduccments of a crooked and perverse generation. And he, who shed his first blood at *eight days* old, will know and save them who begin to be his at the same age. But withal, let it be our constant business to second and confirm these good beginnings by timely instruction and a virtuous education. For dreadful will their condemnation be whose own bowels shall rise up against them in the day of judgment, and upbraid that cruel fondness that laid the foundation of their vices and their torments. But blessed are those pious souls who increase the kingdom of God with every addition to their own family, and double every joy of heaven to themselves, by those of the children which they have led or sent before them thither, by a race of good men here, and of glorified saints hereafter. Which that we may all be, God of his infinite mercy grant, for the sake of his dear Son Christ Jesus, our blessed Saviour and only Redeemer; to whom be glory for ever. Amen.

The Epiphany, or the Manifestation of CHRIST to the Gentiles.

THE COLLECT.

O GOD, who by the leading of a ^astar didst manifest thy only-begotten Son to the Gentiles; Mercifully grant, that we, which know thee now by faith, may after this life have the fruition of thy glorious Godhead; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

THE EPISTLE. Ephes. iii. 1.

¹ *For this cause, I Paul, the prisoner of Jesus Christ for you Gentiles,* I. Since therefore God hath been graciously pleased to unite Jews and Gentiles into one mystical body (see chap. ii.), I, who have suffered so many persecutions, and am now under imprison-

^a Matt. ii. 2, 9, 10.

ment at Rome for asserting the privileges of the Gentile converts to the faith, beseech you to walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called. (Chap. iv. 1.)

2 If ye have heard of the dispensation of the grace of God which is given me to you-ward :

3 How that by revelation he made known unto me the mystery ; (as I wrote afore in few words,

4 Whereby, when ye read, ye may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ)

5 Which in other ages was not made known unto the sons of men, as it is now revealed unto his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit ;

imparted to the ministers of the Gospel. (For the calling of the Gentiles, though predicted under the Old Testament, yet was not, as to all the terms and methods and privileges of it, understood as now it is.)

6 That the Gentiles should be fellowheirs, and of the same body, and partakers of his promise in Christ by the gospel :

the privileges of the gospel, (not as they that were proselytes to the Jewish church had used to be, but) in all points upon equal advantage with the Jews, and this too without any obligation of submitting to their law.

7 Wherof I was made a minister, according to the gift of the grace of God given unto me by the effectual working of his power.

goodness to make use of me as an instrument, and to certify his choice and approbation of me by miracles confirming the doctrine I preach.

8 Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints, is this grace given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ ;

9 And to make all men see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the world hath been hid in God, who created all things by Jesus Christ :

able benefits of the gospel, and the wonderful goodness of Christ in imparting them, and knitting all nations together in one body. Which hath been God's design all along, who thus both made the material and new-made the spiritual world by Jesus Christ.

10 To the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places

2, 3, 4, 5. For sure ye cannot but know how God hath commissioned me to be your preacher and apostle ; and that God by special revelation declared to me that secret purpose (of which I have spoken briefly in the two chapters foregoing) which they who lived heretofore had not the like distinct knowledge of, as is now by the Holy Ghost im-

6. That purpose of God, I mean, concerning the Gentiles being received into all

points upon equal advantage

7. And in order to the making known and bringing about this purpose, it hath pleased God in his great

pleased God in his great

8, 9. Not that I suppose myself to have any merit or abilities superior to others. Quite otherwise. But it

hath pleased God to commit to me, the meanest of Christians, that greatest of trusts ; to bring the glad tidings to the Gentiles of the inestimable

benefits of the gospel, and the wonderful goodness of Christ in imparting them, and knitting all nations together in one body. Which hath been God's design all along, who thus both made the material and new-made the spiritual world by Jesus Christ.

10, 11. Thus, by the gathering of such a church

might be known by the church the manifold wisdom of God,

11 *According to the eternal purpose which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord :*

or (as others) the heathen powers, and princes and magistrates of this world (for so ἀρχαὶ καὶ ἐξουσίαι are used, Luke xii. 11. and Tit. iii. 1.): the several methods and dispensations in every age being now manifestly seen to conspire in accomplishing that purpose of God from all eternity, of saving all mankind by Jesus Christ our Lord.

12 *In whom we have boldness and access with confidence by the faith of him.*

12. And, as all God's dealings with men centre in him, so do all our hopes too. For the believing and trusting in him as our Saviour, this, and this only, does procure us admittance to God, and qualify us to come freely, as resting upon and being well assured of his love and favour upon this account.

COMMENT.

THAT this festival was ever had in great veneration is evident from the writings of the fathers, and the constant practice of all ages in the Christian church. How deservedly it was so, appears from the mighty blessings commemorated by it; the manifestation of our Lord and Saviour, not only to the wise men who came from the East to worship him, but to all those of whom they were the figures and forerunners, the whole Gentile world. Thus was the mercy accomplished which in them had been begun. Thus is the solemnity of our Lord's birth closed with thanksgivings for a benefit which finished and gave effect to all we have already praised him for. For to how little purpose had light come into the world, if the world had not been directed to and made partakers of that light? Most just therefore are the solemnities of this day, most fitly do they follow those of our Lord's incarnation, which celebrate a discovery so happy, that without it that very incarnation, an act of grace, how glorious and wonderful soever in itself, had yet been no blessing to us.

It was a farther accession to the honour of this day that the holy Jesus was supposed to have been upon it baptized in the river Jordan by John. Which St. Chrysostom^b mentions, not only as a thing notorious in his time, but as a principal cause of the respects paid to it by the church. To which let me add an ancient tradition, that upon this day also our Saviour is supposed to have given the first proof of his divine power, by turning water into wine at the marriage in Cana of Galilee.

Upon so many accounts hath this festival been thought to challenge our more than ordinary regard. The memory of the two latter continues still to be in some measure preserved and acknowledged by the second lessons appointed for morning and evening service^c. But

^b Tom. v. Serm. 74. ed. Eton.

^c Luke iii; John ii.

the two former, as more important in themselves and their consequences, and more nearly concerning us, are chiefly recommended to our observation. Of these the Gospel propounds to us the case of the wise men, the Epistle that of the Gentiles at large. This I am now therefore to enter upon; and it does not appear to me what better or more seasonable improvement can be made of it than by considering the matter at large, and by endeavouring to represent, as briefly and plainly as I can,

I. First, the miserable condition of mankind as it was before, and must for ever have continued without the coming of our blessed Saviour.

II. Secondly, the happy change effected by his coming, and the manifestation of him to the world. From whence will naturally and manifestly follow a

III. Third consideration, concerning the influence and good effect which the two heads foregoing ought to have upon us.

I. The first thing that offers itself to us is the miserable condition of mankind, as it was before, and would for ever have continued, without the coming and manifestation of a Saviour. Of this the Scriptures try to make us sensible by great variety of representations: all of them very pertinent, all very melancholy and moving: but, to make as short work as I can, I will confine myself to one, than which as none is more familiar and frequent, so none can be more suitable and proper; for indeed it comprehends and implics all the rest under the name of *darkness*.

Thus the ignorance of the heathens is emphatically called *darkness*; their vices, *the works of darkness*; their superstition and idolatry, *the kingdom of darkness*; the objects of their false worship, *trulers of darkness*; and the persons under the tyranny of these abominations are said to *walk in darkness*, to *sit and abide in darkness*, to *love darkness*, to be *of the night and of darkness*, nay, even to be *darkness itself*.

By comparing these expressions, we may soon be convinced that the Holy Ghost designed to signify what our own senses and experience prove darkness to be; a state of utter inactivity or perpetual wandering; a state of danger and discomfort, of fears unaccountable and terror insupportable; of all that can answer the wretched condition of men lost and bewildered in the night, with snares and precipices on every side them; a state, that robs us of our noblest sense, disables or confounds all our powers of motion, and is that to which, of all other calamities, we seem to have the most natural, the most just, the most unconquerable aversion.

How well the condition of the Gentiles heretofore deserved this metaphor in all its dismal import, as it is not possible fully to declare, so neither is it of any great consequence now to understand, except so far as a sense of this misery may contribute to worthy and thank-

d 2 Cor. iv. 6; vi. 11; 1 John ii. 8.

e Rom. xiii. 12; Ephes. v. 11.

f Rev. xvi. 10.

g Ephes. vi. 12.

h 1 John i. 6; ii. 11; Luke i. 79; John xii. 46; iii. 19; 1 Thess. v. 5; Ephes. v. 8.

ful apprehensions of the goodness of God, expressed in that happy change of affairs which is reserved for the subject of my second head.

I. Now first. As darkness denotes ignorance and error, theirs, it is evident, was gross and general, a darkness that might even be felt. To prove this, we need no long particular, no tragical enumeration of the vices or the superstitions which brought a scandal upon human nature, after a very short description by St. Paul, which more than suffices for that purpose.

For who can read the first chapter to the Romans without amazement and many mortifying reflections, to see rational creatures capable of so wretched a degeneracy, that no object was so despicable as not to be thought worthy of divine honours; no vice so detestable or brutish as not to obtain, not only in common conversation, but even in their rituals of religion and most solemn acts of worship?

Some few great souls indeed did raise themselves above the rubbish and filth of these ruins of human nature. They lamented or despised the stupidity or the credulity of the vulgar. But that knowledge which discerned the folly of others was not able to attain wisdom itself. And the effect of it seems to have been perpetual scepticism; a floating between all opinions and principles, discarding that which was manifestly wrong, but not settling their minds in that which is good and right. In matters too of moral good and evil, though some of the rules and reflections they have left us are at once matter of wonder and reproach to the many many Christians who neglect the improvement of a much clearer light, yet even here they who advanced farthest stopped a great way short. The nature and obliquity of several vices, the proper ends of moral actions in general, the certainty of a future state, the solemn account to be rendered of all our actions; these, which now are or ought to be the governing principles of every Christian's behaviour, were what they understood but little of, and consequently could not be greatly influenced by. This produced both in their discourses such uncertainty and such monstrous inconsistency in their lives, that one can hardly say which is more strange, that they should come so near truth, or that they should miss of it at last; that their examples should speak them almost more than men in some actions, and yet little if at all better than brutes in others.

When matters stood thus as to ignorance and error, the metaphor of *darkness* could not be ill suited, as it implies a state of danger and discomfort and fear. The Holy Spirit frequently flies to bodily exigencies and defects and distresses, for giving us a more lively apprehension and tender concern in things that cannot fall under the notice of our senses. And we deceive ourselves infinitely, if we suppose that any of those resemblances do, or indeed can overstrain the point, by representing things worse than really they are. For how hard soever it may be to persuade men so, yet certain it is that blindness in our bodily eyes is a calamity in no degree comparable to that in the eyes of our mind; and that, of all the instances of misery that attend a misguided understanding, none is so dreadful, none so deplorable, as that of men being left in the dark or led wrong in

matters relating to God and religion. Now the case of these wanderers in the night, before the gospel, was such as made them sensible of being out of the way, but kept them at a loss how to get into it. The glimmerings of reason, unassisted, except with the help of some ancient traditions, which had been maimed and mangled by often transplanting, sufficed to discover a mighty depravity in nature, to fill them with suspicions and fears of what might be hereafter; but at the same time that it shewed their danger, it neither taught nor enabled them to shun it. And what can we form to ourselves more lamentable, than that man's misgiving circumstances, who feels and languishes under his disease, but knows not where to seek a remedy? what more confounding than a sense of guilt, to one destitute of means either for pardon or amendment? So very fitly may we apply to the then wisest of the heathen world those words of our Saviour upon a different occasion, *If even the light that is in thee be darkness, how great, how very wretched is that darkness!*

But praised be the mercy of our God, who took compassion upon poor lost sinners, and left them not for ever to perish in their misery and folly. A most comfortable and reviving account whereof I am now about to set forth under my second head, which consists of

II. 'The happy change effected by the coming and manifestation of our blessed Saviour: who is therefore called, *'the light of men, a light to lighten the Gentiles*; the gospel is called, *his marvellous light*; they that believe and obey it are said to *walk in the light, to love the light, to be children of light*, nay to be *light*; with sundry other expressions that bear exact proportion to the already mentioned miseries from which men were thus delivered, and denote the very reverse of all they felt or feared or had been before.

The thick night of ignorance and confounding mists of error are now perfectly scattered, and in their stead succeeds a clear bright noon-day sun of knowledge and instruction in the ways of righteousness. The precipices and snares removed from all who take care to avoid them, and all the rocks on which unwary souls were wont to split laid bare and levelled, and a straight, smooth, certain way to heaven discovered. So that nothing is now left upon us more than to direct our desires and steps to happiness and salvation. Despair and doubtful fear quite banished; and cheerful hope, and a mind at peace with God and its own self, are the joyful portion of them who submit to its guidance. A light so diffusive and withal so strong, that whereas other former revelations are compared to those feeble assistances of *'lamps to men's feet, lanterns to their paths, a candle shining in a dark place*, and the like; the gospel and its divine Author have their perfections expressed by the *'daystar, the dayspring from on high, the day, the sun of righteousness, a sun that rises with healing under his wings*, and, like that other sun in the firmament, sheds his rays so far and wide, that the darkest and most distant corners of the earth may feel the cheering influence, and *there is nothing hid from the heat thereof*.

¹ John i. 4; Luke ii. 32; ¹ Pet. ii. 9; John xii. 36; ¹ John i. 7; Ephes. v. 8.

² Psalm cix.

¹ 2 Pet. i. 19; Luke i. 79; ¹ Thess. v. 6; Malac. iv. 2.

How these so forcible metaphors are justified, it may become us (on this day especially) to observe, by descending to particulars answerable to the several branches of that misery wherein the darkness of former ages hath already been shewn to consist.

1. As first. For ignorance and error. This, with regard to the heathen's vicious lives, was dispersed by that abhorrence of evil and severe purity of heart and life enjoined in the gospel. Which presses all those chaste and virtuous affections that tend to the *possessing our vessels in sanctification and honour*. All that watchful care and strict guard over ourselves, which may subdue the sensual appetite, preserve the obedience of the flesh to the spirit, and keep body and spirit both in constant resignation to the will of God: all that meekness and modesty, that justice and charity which secure our duty to others, and cut off the pride and covetousness, the envy and ambition, and every other unruly lust whereby society suffers, humanity and good nature is checked and disused to men in general, or those mutual duties neglected which arise from the different relations and capacities of men in particular.

The old idolatry and superstition is quite extirpated by giving men rational and consistent and worthy notions of God. Inasmuch that all those difficulties in which the wisest heretofore were entangled, concerning the nature, the providence, the power, the justice and wisdom of God; the origin and government of the world; the immortality of the soul; the state and judgment after death; the principles of moral actions; the ends to which they ought to be directed; the deductions of particular duties from general rules;—these things are all so fairly represented, so fully and distinctly laid down in the doctrine of Jesus Christ, that what before was hid from the most prudent and expert is now revealed to babes. The men of mean condition and slender attainments may learn and improve here. And what some nice conceited people would have us believe to be still wanting, is not a matter of true religion and sober virtue, but of unprofitable speculation and wanton curiosity.

2. Then for the jealous fears and sad discomforts of darkness, this gospel is truly light with regard to the covenant of grace established by it. A covenant that proclaims satisfaction already made, and pardon to be obtained, for the chief of sinners; that allows for failings, strengthens and helps human infirmities, changes men from enemies and aliens to friends and children, makes the bad good, and assists the good to grow every day better. And though our endeavours still stop short of those degrees of goodness which we wish and labour hard to obtain, yet it is our comfort and privilege unspeakable, that even imperfect and unsuccessful (when sincere) attempts will be graciously accepted, notwithstanding some alloy of sin, for the sake of Him who knew no sin, of Him who died to take away sin, and upon condition of an humble faith, sincere repentance, and steadfast perseverance in goodness to the best of that power we have.

Thus does the gospel of our dear Redeemer provide for the quiet of our minds, and lay all that confusion and dread to sleep, which loads

the spirits of men conscious of their own guilt, and full of sad forebodings what dismal consequences it may have. It settles our peace with God, by an undoubted persuasion that his offended justice, not only may be, but actually is, entreated, appeased, reconciled; and by rendering this most comfortable truth a fundamental article of our religion. It secures ease and mutual enjoyment among men, by mortifying those passions whence wars and contentions grow, by raising our hearts to a better world, and inspiring a just contempt of this; by rules of the most extensive, most generous, most forgiving charity; and by enforcing those rules with a most powerful example of the Light of the world, the Son of God himself, doing well and suffering ill, with meekness unparalleled, and patience invincible, and love unmeasurable. So abundantly does the coming and manifestation of this blessed Saviour change the circumstances of mankind, and put a new and cheerful face upon all their affairs; for though I have not, cannot form to myself all the terrors of that once dismal darkness, and am as far from worthily describing the beauties, the comforts, the inestimable advantages of this heavenly saving light, yet, from that shadow only of the one, and this small glimpse of the other, we are, I hope, very seriously disposed to consider that which indeed requires our most careful consideration, I mean my

III. Third and last head, the powerful influence and good effect which the two former particulars ought to have; what affections in our hearts, what virtues in our lives, it is reasonable they should excite and promote. The influence ought indeed to extend to every kind of good action and disposition; but among others, those that follow seem to be such as we can by no means be excused from.

1. The first and most natural obligation arising from hence is that of answering the design of this festival in unfeigned thankfulness and praise to Almighty God, for so great, so seasonable, so undeserved a blessing, as that of sending light into the world, and giving us leave to be partakers of that light. A blessing great beyond all comparison, whether we reflect upon the Person that wrought out this salvation, the manner of working it, the largeness and extent of it, or the horror and miseries it saves from. A blessing seasonable to poor abandoned men, who had neither the power nor so much as the will to help themselves. For this is sure the extremity of misery and ruin, to be undone and not sensible of the sadness of our case; nay, even to cherish and be fond of the mischief that undoes us. A blessing, to be sure, most undeserved. For what could creatures merit at the hands of their Creator? What indeed of vengeance and utter destruction had sinful creatures not deserved at the hands of a just and terrible Judge? *What then was man, that God should thus remember him?* But what was dark and depraved, obstinate and rebellious man, that this *dayspring from on high* should vouchsafe thus to *visit him*? What shall we render for such benefits? This sure we shall not fail in, the tribute of our praises, the daily acknowledgments of that *inestimable love* expressed by the *Father of mercies* in the *redemption of the world* by his *Son Jesus Christ*. And therefore, when we come

before the throne of grace, with hearts warmed with the most affectionate zeal, and tongues full of holy thanks and joy, let us remember that no other subject ought to raise these so high, that none can in any degree be compared, none is fit to be so much as named, with that of *Jesus Christ, both God and man*, doing and suffering so much for us miserable sinners, who lay in darkness and in the shadow of death, that he might make us the children of God, and exalt us to everlasting life.

2. Secondly. Since true thankfulness consists in converting the benefit we acknowledge to the use it was intended to serve, it is by no means enough that we feel, and own, and publish, unless we add to all these a right improvement of this wonderful mercy. Hence Christians (with regard to the allusion of this day's service, and this discourse in particular) are often urged with such texts as these: *"Let us cast away the works of darkness, and let us put on the armour of light. Let us walk honestly as in the day."* *"Ye were sometimes darkness, but now are ye light: walk as children of light."* *"Ye are all the children of light, and the children of the day: we are not of the night, nor of darkness. Therefore let us not sleep, as do others; but let us watch and be sober."* And once more, *"This is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds are evil."* The true intent of which, and infinite like passages, in short is this: That the gospel requires a conversation suitable to its doctrine; that men are bound to improve in virtue, in proportion as their knowledge to do well, or the means of it, improve upon them. That sensuality and all manner of wickedness are perfectly monstrous and absurd, dishonourable and incongruous to the religion we profess; and that it highly concerns us not to allow ourselves in any thing, but what is of a piece with, and may well become, and is sure to make for the credit of, the Christian faith; and again, that if men will not use the opportunities of knowing their duty, which are now so plentifully put into their hands, the case of such obstinate people as will not be taught, as well as theirs who live in contradiction to what they are taught, will be sure to draw on a heavier guilt and punishment than if such advantages of knowing and doing better had never been afforded them at all.

Now, that there is and always was but too just occasion for such exhortations and solemn warnings as these, our own reason and woful experience too manifestly convince us. For, alas! it is a melancholy truth, that all who live under the shine of this light do not walk as children of light. But then, as the fact is plain, so is it likewise very plain where the fault does, and where the whole reflection ought to lie. The day is sufficiently clear, and does its proper business; but if the light it brings be not received and used, this is no more to its disparagement, than their stumbling at noon is to the sun, who, when he shines brightest, shut up their room, or wink hard against him.

Again. The end of this light is to guide our feet. But if we refuse to be guided at all, or abuse it to the choice of wrong ways, it is we

only must bear the shame, and every other dismal consequence of our perverse wanderings. And this is what our Saviour calls *the condemnation*, that when men could not complain for want of light, they were yet so absurd as to hate the light and give the preference to darkness. And because this was their choice, therefore it proved their ruin. So gracious and bountiful is God in dispensing the means of salvation; but withal so just and terrible in punishing the neglect or abuse of those means: and therefore so diligent ought we to be to answer the purpose and live worthy of his mercies; so careful, that our advantages be not one day produced as articles against us, and the very clearness of our light become an occasion of sentencing us to utter and eternal darkness.

3. Thirdly, the sense of this compassion to ourselves, and to mankind in general, should inspire us with an active zeal for the good of one another, as we have power and opportunity of imitating that great example. Contributing to the better state of our brethren, in all respects and capacities, is one of the surest marks of a Christian indeed. But the sort of kindness I chiefly aim at recommending upon this occasion, is a kindness that keeps closest to our pattern: the most noble and valuable in itself, the most beneficial to them upon whom it is bestowed, and yet, I am sorry to say, the most neglected and disregarded of any other. A becoming tenderness, I mean, for the souls of men, and earnest endeavours to make them better and happier; but especially the laying out these holy labours upon the persons who stand in greatest need of them. For how apt are men, even zealous and good in other respects, to overlook the mean and unlearned, and to detest the notorious and scandalous sinners, while they apply themselves chiefly to the men of more understanding and virtue! Yet so did not our Lord and his gospel take their measures. They stooped down to people at the lowest ebb of knowledge and fortune; and, with more remarkable diligence and importunity, addressed to the illiterate and vulgar, the wandering and the lost, the lame and the blind, the publicans and the harlots, the Gentiles and profane. And we, in like manner, should consider the unhappiness of ill men's circumstances as a more powerful argument to a greater degree of charity; not disdaining the most ignorant and mistaken, nor giving over the most profligate and perverse. And if, as it too often happens, the one will not receive our instruction, nor the other endure our reproof, yet even then pitying and praying for them still. And the worse we find their condition, the more intractable their dispositions, the more vehemently must we strive with God on their behalf; that he would soften their hearts, and shew them their errors, and bring them first to a teachable temper, and then into the ways of holiness and truth.

4. Fourthly: this light, so liberally shed abroad by the coming and manifestation of our blessed Saviour, should stir up in every man strong desires to see as much of it as he can. Every one hath not, cannot have an equal share of this light, because every one is not equally prepared to receive it. But in regard it offers itself to all,

and the necessary doctrines of it may be known by all, it must needs be great unthankfulness to God, great wrong to ourselves, not to love and covet and diligently inquire after it. And therefore men should make it a mighty point of conscience, not to absent themselves unnecessarily from the ordinances of God, the times and places of public worship where the word is read and explained, the sacraments duly administered, and many singular helps to salvation offered to men's acceptance. They should likewise when present there be exceeding attentive, careful to remember, to recollect, to apply, to practise what they hear. To these public they should also add those private means, of frequent reading, pious meditation and fervent prayer. The gentler sentence upon him who knew not his master's will, and therefore did it not, belongs to such servants only as would have known it if they could, and would have done it if they had known it. But a double woe will be their portion, who might have known it and would not; nay, who for that very reason would not know it, that they might have the better pretence not to do it.

5. Fifthly, since the Apostle here observes that the Gentiles, by being called to the light of the gospel, were united in one body, I cannot but conjure every Christian to take occasion from hence of examining very strictly, whether this light have had that proper effect upon him which such an union with God and all his fellow Christians is designed to suggest to us; whether the constant tenor of his actions be that which may secure him peace with God, and tends to promote unity and charity among men. For if this clearer knowledge do not produce piety and devotion, purity of life, chastity, sobriety, temperance, and the conquest of his lusts and passions; if the religion he professes be not an effectual bond of order and love; if it be made a mask to cover disobedience or faction or schism; if it put forth in pride or envy, in spite or uncharitableness; if he in wicked zeal sow strife and discord, and think to sanctify division and mischief in church or state or private families; this man, whatever vain boasts of light he may make, is still in darkness, and abideth in darkness. For the only evidence of our being in the light of Jesus is that of *walking in the light as he is in the light*; reflecting back again the lustre of his rays, and taking care to make *our light so shine before men*, that they may glorify the giver of it, that *Father of lights which is in heaven*.

Such are the considerations, such the improvements, which the portion of Scripture now in hand, and the honours due to this day, suggest very naturally to us. By making a right use of these we shall celebrate our Lord's Epiphany indeed. A festival, which scarce in any age called for a more devout solemnizing than now. When, by a degeneracy peculiar to these dregs of time, a set of Christians falsely so called, though to their shame baptized and educated in the faith, do yet with boldness lessen and detract from the inestimable benefits we have been contemplating, turn advocates for, and would

gladly reduce us to, the conduct of reason and natural religion. Ungrateful men! who, if they judge more justly, or live more regularly upon the measures of true or false, of good or evil, than those great names heretofore, (who were, I hope, at least their equals in all the advantages nature and industry and good sense could give,) are beholden for it to this very light, which they labour in requital to diminish the necessity and usefulness of. But sure we have not so learned Christ, as to quit his *unsearchable riches* for so wretched a voluntary poverty. No, let us rather, by the honours paid this day, testify to the world our grateful senso of the mercies it commemorates; and thus declare how little we think ourselves obliged by those, who, under the false name of freedom, would bring us again into the slavery of darkness. A rule of belief and manners, whose defects they no doubt are equally sensible of; and give us too just cause to suspect, that, while they bend their forces against revealed, their real design is to subvert all religion: as knowing, that if the former be once given up, the natural, for which they now profess so heartily to contend, cannot long stand its ground. And therefore we can never sufficiently praise, admire, and adore the goodness of our God, who hath not put us upon the foot the Jews wore formerly, but, without the discipline of their legal yoke, hath commanded day to break in upon us at once, revealed the mysteries that thus only could be known, directed us in the way acceptable to himself, and hath given us *boldness and access with confidence by the faith of Jesus Christ*. To whom, with the Father and the Holy Spirit, three Persons and one God, be by us and all mankind ascribed honour and glory, adoration and thanksgiving, henceforth and for evermore. Amen.

THE GOSPEL. St. Matt. ii. 1.

1 *Now when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judæa in the days of Herod the king, behold, there came wise men from the east to Jerusalem,*

2 *Saying, Where is he that is born King of the Jews? for we have seen his star in the east, and are come to worship him.*

(and consequently at the time agreeing with Jacob's prophecy, Gen. xlix. 10.) there came out of the east country wise men, inquiring what was the place in which the Messiah was to be born; moved to this journey by the appearance of an extraordinary star, which they understood to be an indication of this eminent person's birth; and therefore travelled to Jerusalem by its direction, expecting there to be informed where they were to pay their adoration to him.

3 *When Herod the king had heard these things, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him.*

4 *And when he had gathered all the chief priests and scribes of the people*

1, 2. Shortly after the birth of Jesus in Bethlehem of the tribe of Judah, while Herod, who was by birth an Idumæan, ruled the Jews, (and consequently at the

time agreeing with Jacob's prophecy, Gen. xlix. 10.) there came out of the east country wise men, inquiring what was the place in which the Messiah was to be born; moved to this journey by the appearance of an extraordinary star, which they understood to be an indication of this eminent person's birth; and therefore travelled to Jerusalem by its direction, expecting there to be informed where they were to pay their adoration to him.

4. He therefore summoned all the learned ex-

together, he demanded of them where Christ should be born.

say what place was determined for the birth of Christ.

5 And they said unto him, In Bethlehem of Judæa: for thus it is written by the prophet,

6 And thou Bethlehem, in the land of Juda, art not the least among the princes of Juda: for out of thee shall come a Governor, that shall rule my people Israel. inconsiderable in itself, should yet be in the Messiah.

7 Then Herod, when he had privily called the wise men, enquired of them diligently what time the star appeared.

8 And he sent them to Bethlehem, and said, Go and search diligently for the young child; and when ye have found him, bring me word again, that I may come and worship him also.

colour of intending him the same respects himself,) he dismissed them to the place determined by the chief priests and scribes.

9 When they had heard the king, they departed; and, lo, the star, which they saw in the east, went before them, till it came and stood over where the young child was.

to encourage their faith and zeal, God was pleased, not only to shew them the star again which occasioned their setting out from home at first, but to cause it to move directly to, and then to stop directly at, the place where the child was.

10 When they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceeding great joy.

that God approved and would prosper their journey.

11 And when they were come into the house, they saw the young child with Mary his mother, and fell down, and worshipped him: and when they had opened their treasures, they presented unto him gifts; gold, and frankincense, and myrrh.

vert their intended respects. But, according to the manner of the eastern countries, they came before him with prostrations, and made him a present of such things as with them were reputed of value, and fit to express their reverence for him.

12 And being warned of God in a dream that they should not return to Herod, they departed into their own country another way.

Herod, and that his pretence of worshipping was a cloak to the inten-

pounders of the law and the prophets, requiring them to

5, 6. They, without great difficulty, pitch upon Bethlehem in the tribe of Judah; and ground this resolution upon a prophecy of Micah, wherein it is declared, that this city, however small and great renown for the birth of

7, 8. This answer Herod imparted to the wise men; and, after particular examination about the time when they first saw this star, and a strict charge to come back and inform him where this child was to be found, (under colour of intending him the same respects himself,) he dismissed them

9. Having received the king's commands, they proceeded on their journey. And, to confirm the intelligence they received at Jeru-

salem, to encourage their faith and zeal, God was pleased, not only to shew them the star again which occasioned their setting out from home at first, but to cause it to move directly to, and then to stop directly at, the place where the child was.

10. This revived their spirits, and satisfied them

that God approved and would prosper their journey.

11. Arriving at the place, they found Jesus and his mother in mean and humble manner, without pomp or attendance. Yet did not

this unkingly appearance divert their intended respects. But, according to the manner of the eastern countries, they came before him with prostrations, and made him a present of such things as with them were reputed of value, and fit to express their reverence for him.

12. This being done, when they were about to return, God (who saw the hypocrisy and malicious designs of

Herod, and that his pretence of worshipping was a cloak to the inten-

tion of killing this child) by a particular intimation diverted them from their purpose of carrying back word to Jerusalem where this child was to be found, as the king had commanded them. And so they went home a different way from that by which they came.

COMMENT.

It was not fit that a Saviour, born for the benefit of all, should be known only to a few. And therefore the humble circumstances, which obscured his setting out, gave occasion for making a discovery more noble and surprising. Had he made his entry with a pomp at all suitable to his greatness, curiosity and common fame had soon spread the news. But a small city and a poor cottage, a stable and a manger, attract no eyes, employ no tongues; but what observation and report did not, a star soon published to remote people, and strangers hastened to pay their devotions to this Divine Babe. The length of their journey, the eagerness of their zeal, the anxious concern to find him, the reverence paid him when found, are incidents too remarkable to be passed over, either by the Evangelist, without mention in his story, or by the Church, without the solemnity of a festival. For in these persons we also have an interest. They were the types, the early figures, the happy first fruits of us Gentiles, who have since had the *glory* of this *daystar from on high shining* in our respective countries also, and, with so vast numbers and amazing success, came into *the brightness of his rising*.

What I have to offer upon this occasion will be comprised under three heads:

I. The first concerns these persons, and the star under whose conduct they came to Christ.

II. In the second I shall consider the particular method made choice of for bringing them to the knowledge of him.

III. And under the last, I will make some observations upon their behaviour in this affair.

I. The first thing necessary upon this occasion is, to give some short account of these travellers, what they were, and whence they came. The Greek word, literally rendered, is *magicians*. Which, however now speaking an ill character, was yet heretofore a name of very innocent, nay, honourable signification. The studious and inquisitive, whose business and profession led them to search into nature, its more abstruse causes and effects, and more particularly into the motions and dispositions of the heavenly bodies, were distinguished by this title. In what veneration and profound respect they were held appears from the most important matters, both sacred and civil, being committed to their administration. They were the counsellors, the judges, the priests, the princes, in a word, the oracles of the Eastern countries.

But, as the best arts are sometimes perverted to ill purposes, so it happened that these were in process of time, by corrupting those noble speculations of the heavens with pretended prognostications and charms, and a thousand idle and wicked superstitions. Thus falling

into ill hands, who met with people credulous and ignorant, not only easy, but even glad to be deluded, they degenerated into the cheats of judiciary astrology; and these abuses grew so general, as at last to fix an ill sense upon the word, and a scandal upon the science itself. It were a wrong and great indignity to the persons now before us not to believe them of the nobler and better sort. Of which ours and some other translators of the Bible have been so sensible, as very prudently to decline the odious name of magicians, and to call them *wise men* from the East.

But what and where this East was, is a question upon which interpreters have been much divided. Some conceiving them to come out of Persia, others from Chaldea, others from Arabia Felix, and others again from Mesopotamia. These all lay eastward from Jerusalem and the Holy Land, which is the common way of assigning any quarter in Jewish writers. In each of these some antecedent notions of a Messiah may be accounted for. In Chaldea and Persia, by the captivity of the Jews and the Book of Daniel; in Arabia, by the nearness of their neighbourhood and frequent commerce; in Mesopotamia, not only these, but an eminent prophecy of that countryman, Balaam, might furnish them, who foretold the Messiah in the quality of a star. Thus much, at least, each of these opinions hath to say for itself; and we may fairly leave their respective advocates to dispute it out; for though it be a point of learning, it is none of religion; and, because not necessary, the matter is not great if it be not possible absolutely to determine the controversy.

Concerning the star, we meet with somewhat better agreement; for this is generally allowed to be no common one. Its motion, contrary to the ordinary course of stars; its performing the part of a guide to these travellers, and that probably by day as well as by night; the accommodating itself to their necessities, disappearing and returning, as they could best or least be without it; and, which is a circumstance as remarkable as any of the rest, the pointing out and standing over where this young child was; (whereas the height and distance of common stars must needs leave men in confusion, and neither a particular house nor a city like Bethlehem can be pitched upon for its particular direction.) Those all are condescensions out of the course of nature, and such as require a miraculous operation. And they have carried St. Chrysostom yet farther^t. For he supposes this not to have been any real though extraordinary star, but some rational and heavenly power assuming that form, like the Israelites' angel in the cloudy pillar. But, however that be, the hand of God was manifest, and his wisdom manifest in it. Of which that we may be more fully satisfied, let us leave these pilgrims at Bethlehem, whither this wonder of a star conducted them, and turn our thoughts upon my

II. Second head, wherein I purpose to make some remarks upon the method made choice of for bringing these persons to Christ; and

^t Hom. 6. in Matt.

because this action prefigured the conversion of the Gentile world, to render what I shall say the more improving, we will carry on and compare what was done here to the means used for bringing men to the blessed Jesus in a saving and spiritual sense.

I. Now first, it was not only exceeding gracious, but exceeding prudent too in Almighty God to appoint a star for the signal given to these persons of his Son's being born into the world. Because their studies lying to these heavenly bodies, above any other sensible part of the creation, would naturally dispose them to observe more heedfully, and be wrought upon more powerfully by extraordinary appearances in this than in any other kind. Not but that a miracle of any sort had sufficed to shew the power and presence of Almighty God; but we should greatly deceive ourselves in supposing that every argument of equal strength will always approve itself of equal efficacy in the application.

For men's affections and wills are concerned in their assent as well as their understanding; and therefore the solidity and the intrinsic weight of the motives propounded are greatly forwarded by such favourable circumstances as make way for their being well received. Now this is never done to better purpose than when an argument falls in with the particular genius and inclination of the party concerned to attend to it. This made a star more suitable to the wise men than a vision, or a prophecy, or a voice from heaven. Those indeed had signified the thing in as plain, but this did it in a more acceptable manner.

And the same method is observable in the ordinary operations of grace and the gospel. The manifold instructions and motives for men's conversion and improvement being admirably accommodated to their tempers and employments, to the present exigencies of their condition, to the received customs of their country, and to those topics of reasoning which daily use and secular business had rendered most familiar and most agreeable to them. Thus we find our blessed Saviour and his apostles give a mighty addition to the force and beauty of their miracles and their deportment, their parables and their discourses.

—When fishermen were to be convinced, and gained over to our Lord's more immediate service, the wonder made use of for that end was an extraordinary and unexpected draught of fishes^u. When vast multitudes, who followed him till they almost had fainted by the way, were to be assured of his divine power, the instance chosen to prove it was *feeding five thousand with five barley loaves and two small fishes*. The toiling all night to no effect, in that very place and ship, prepared the former of these miracles for a stronger impression; and the distress and hunger of the people rendered the latter the most reasonable proof of omnipotence that in those circumstances was possible to be given.

It is upon this account that the proceedings of Almighty God with

^u Luke v.

^x Matt. xiv; John vi.

mankind, the successes of his doctrine, and the state of those that come into it, are so often represented by the well known similitudes of sowing good seed, of tares mingled and scattered upon that seed, of setting out vineyards, of pruning and dressing trees, and the like, because these images were taken from such things as men daily conversed with and were employed about.

Hence, when St. Paul argues about Christian liberty with his proselytes at Rome, who had most of them come over from the law of Moses, he does it from principles of Judaism; but when treating of the same subject to the Corinthians, whose conversation had been Pagan, he turns the discourse to idol-feasts and idol-temples. To the Jews he urges the testimonies of the prophets and types of the Levitical law; to the Gentiles, the common grounds of morality, testimonies of heathen poets, and frequent allusions to the Olympic games, so well understood, so highly in request among them.

It were endless to produce the many examples of this in Scripture, and easy to show, not only that this is God's usual method in the teaching part as to public proposals of doctrine, but as to the inward operations of grace too in the breast of each person in particular. For here also the soft and gentle method is taken, such as does not force or drive, but insinuate and lead and win men to goodness. How manifestly do we see in virtues, as well as vices, that they follow in great measure the different complexions of men! And the common way by which the Spirit of God brings us forward is by striking in with our several humours and dispositions, and so promoting those good qualities to which nature had put into us a natural aptitude before.

And indeed it is one great excellence of religion to leave men without constraint in the use of their faculties; not violently to overbear, but secretly to incline them to obedience; as it is another, to be so copious and full of persuasion, that no condition of life, no constitution of body, no temper or turn of mind, can want motives ready cut out for and proper to strike in with it. The cold and phlegmatic and timorous have terrors to spur them up and fright them into duty; the sanguine and bold and fiery have hopes and rewards to allure and push them on; the melancholy have comforts to encourage and support them under their dejections; and the good-natured and generous have love and mercy inexpressible to engage their bounty and gratitude. In a word, all nature, nay, all fortunes abound with particular instructions, in which they have as it were a distinct property of their own.

The masters are to consider that they have a Master in heaven, and therefore must treat their servants with justice and humanity. The servants, that they should serve diligently and contentedly, because to be judged by One who for their sakes disdained not the form of a servant. The husbands must be indulgent and entirely affectionate, because Christ is so to his spouse the church: the wives faithful and obedient, because the church maintains her amity and union with her dear Lord in heaven upon no other terms. The fathers are to imi-

tate the tenderness of their heavenly Father, and children the meek submission of the Son of God. The husbandman hath his Saviour, that spiritual Sower, before his eyes; and, from the good or bad conditioned ground, is led to observe the qualities of his own heart, to correct the barrenness of that soil, and take all possible care that the seed of the Word may bring forth fruit abundantly. The merchant is naturally carried to meditate on that pearl of great price, in the purchase whercof all that he possesses were well and wisely laid out; and the mariner, from rough seas and foul weather, is loudly called upon to make that port where the souls of good men are laid up, at rest from the billows of a tempestuous world, and past danger of suffering shipwreck any more.

Thus every man might single out something in his own constitution and station and business to put him in remembrance of greater and better things; which if attended to would prove like this star to the wise men, and certainly bring him to Christ. For the more familiar any motive is to us, and the oftener it returns upon our thoughts, the more pleasingly will it be entertained, and have the more prevailing influence over us.

My design therefore in enlarging upon this observation is to persuade men that they would study themselves very thoroughly, get well acquainted with the temperament of their bodies, the bent of their affections, the condition of their fortunes, the nature of their callings, the several relations and capacities they stand in to each other; and then, that they would press upon their minds such motives to holiness and virtue more especially, as are best suited and come closest up to their present circumstances. For though no sort of persuasions can be improper, yet those are always best and most proper which are nearest home, apply themselves most naturally and seasonably, and affect us most sensibly. And the true reason, I take it, why religion gets no more ground in the world, is not because it wants arguments sufficient to make men better, but because men are wanting to themselves in a prudent and seasonable and frequent application of the arguments provided and always ready at hand. And it must needs be a mighty advantage those men have who have so fixed their thoughts and fitted reasons to their own case, that they cannot dispatch even their ordinary affairs without somewhat suggested continually from thence which shall improve their souls at the same time. This is for *our conversation* to be in heaven indeed, and, in the best and most spiritual importance of the words, *to live and move and have our being in God*.

2. The next thing I observe on this occasion is what most interpreters consent in, and seems naturally enough collected from the Evangelist's account of the matter, the disappearing of the star during the stay of the wise men at Jerusalem. For both the particle, *lo!* at the ninth verse, and the exceeding greatness of their joy at the tenth, seem to denote the return of a blessing which had for some time been withdrawn from them. And the reason of this is, probably, that it had so far done its business, and put them now into the hands of

other guides. Their design was to worship the new-born *King of the Jews*. And his birth was a subject of concernment so vast and expectation so general, as to fill the minds and mouths of all the prophets, and leave no material circumstance relating to it unforeshadowed long ago. Arriving therefore at Jerusalem, they were in the ready way of regular information; and accordingly, by the interposition of Herod's authority, they quickly learnt, from the unanimous voice of the scribes and chief priests, what place God had ordained to have the honour of giving birth to his Son. That resolution they make no difficulty to depend upon, and direct their course to Bethlehem accordingly. Now this circumstance suggests a very useful reflection upon God's usual manner of bringing souls to Christ, and our duty with regard to it.

My meaning is, that extraordinary means of conversion and salvation are not usually afforded where the ordinary may be had and will suffice for our purpose: so that our business must be to take up with and make our best of those, without presuming upon or waiting for such as, though they may perhaps be more powerful, are not however necessary for our condition. We have very good grounds to believe that God denies no man the abilities and opportunities proper for him; but then this proceeds upon a supposal, that every one be careful to improve such as are allowed him. And as nobody will be called to answer for any thing absolutely out of his power, so no branch of our account is like to lie heavier against us than that wherein our consciences reproach us with the good we should and might have done, but did not, would not do it.

Were this point justly considered, we should soon see an end put to many dangerous errors both in opinion and practice. The boasts of modern miracles, of an infallible judge, and the enthusiastic pretensions to the Spirit, would fall to the ground. Because we should see the mighty difference between a faith yet to be propagated and one already established; between a perfect canon and sure record of Scripture, and an age that had it not; between a settled church, with a regular ministry, and a season of signs and wonders with immediate inspiration; between the common assistances of grace, which, attended by these advantages, are sufficient, and the more powerful illuminations, which, without these, are no more than necessary. Men would not make the want of sudden calls a pretence for spiritual sloth, nor delay for a voice from heaven, when the written word tells them, as plainly now as that voice did St. Paul heretofore, what it is the Lord would have them to do.

In short, while we are at a distance from Jerusalem a *star* may be requisite; but when we are come thither, the priests and the prophecies will inform us where Christ is to be found. That is, when we are not in the way of ordinary methods, God will provide himself and us with others; but so long as we can come at these, we are to use them thankfully and rest contented. A conscientious attendance upon God's holy word and sacraments, seconded by our own sincere endeavours and the constant influences of his grace, (which will be constant

in his help, if we be so in our duty,) will compass as much as is required from us. All sorts of circumstances have their peculiar advantages, and all enough for their respective ends. So that if all be not furnished alike, it is because the wise Manager, though he be liberal, will not be profuse. He therefore alters his methods as he sees cause, and according as the difference of men and times and places calls for a different sort of administration. But still he is not only wise, but good and gracious in every one; for I take notice,

3. Thirdly, that upon these persons leaving Jerusalem the guidance of the same star was restored to them. In this St. Matthew is express. And God seems thus to have ordered the matter, for prevention of any discouragement they might otherwise have received from the coldness and neglect of the Jews upon this occasion; who, startled at the news they brought, received it only as a matter of surprise, but expressed no degree of solicitude, like these strangers, to find out and pay due homage to their own King. It came also seasonably, to satisfy these travellers that God went along with them still, and that the Infant they sought was by no means less adorable and divine than they truly apprehended at their first setting out, notwithstanding the poor and humble figure they were about to see him and his mother make at Bethlehem.

Now the inference from hence I take to be very natural and plain, that, though common methods of conviction and grace will answer all the exigencies of common cases, and we are not excusable when complaining for lack of more; yet, where a case is really extraordinary and uncommon, God will not leave us destitute of assistances proportionable to it. What measures are proper at any time, ourselves are not competent judges. But thus much is certain, that no man hath a good claim to addition and increase who hath not dealt faithfully, and made the most of the measure he hath already received. Let us not therefore faint or distrust *our Father in heaven*, who is always bountiful and kind, though bountiful upon conditions and kind with wisdom. We cannot promise ourselves variety and abundance, but we may depend upon our daily bread; that bread, I mean, which nourishes to life everlasting. St. Paul, when told that *God's grace was sufficient for him*, understood by this, not only that it would suffice for his present difficulties, but for any worse, when any worse should come. And if we do, like him, strive and pray earnestly, we shall not fail of relief in time of need.

All sacred history informs us how largely God hath provided for convincing men's minds; and they who have not been yet persuaded continue ignorant and unbelieving, because they will not hearken to any reasonable persuasion. Now the same care that hath been taken for establishing the truth hath been likewise taken for inviting men to virtue, and for gaining upon their affections as well as upon their judgments. The living well is of as great importance as believing rightly; and it is God who enables us to do both, and in both by extraordinary assistances when the occasion requires such. For a good man, that does his utmost, may safely apply to himself, in every kind

of trial, what the apostle speaks of troubles in particular, that *God is faithful, who will not suffer him to be tempted above that he is able, but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that he may be able to bear it.* To bear it? yea, to encounter and conquer and triumph over it.

Such were the methods in favour of the wise men, such in proportion are they on our behalf. Let it be our care in the meanwhile to preserve as near a likeness in the

III. Third and last head, where I shall make a remark or two on their behaviour upon this occasion. And here I will content myself earnestly to exhort that they may be our patterns, (so far as the cases will bear imitation,) first, in their zeal, conspicuous at the beginning and through the whole progress of their journey; and, secondly, in their joy and satisfaction at the end of it.

1. The former of these is manifest from divers passages in this relation of the thing. To leave their own dwellings upon the single warning of an unusual star; to continue their travels in search of a new King, and with a courage so undaunted to carry the unwelcome news of a suspected Rival to the capital city and court of a jealous tyrant, already infamous for blood; to comply so readily with the voice of the sanhedrim, and persist in their purpose, notwithstanding the consternation of some and the indifference of others in a matter wherein all were so deeply concerned: these are qualities very remarkable in them; and they are so many prefigurations of those Gentiles whose conversion their success and this journey represented. For such were their disadvantages too, in comparison of the privileges and preparations to Christianity which the Jews enjoyed above them; such was their early zeal to a new and altogether strange doctrine, which broke in upon them at once; and so just a reproach to them, whom neither former revelations, nor ancient prophecies, nor infinite discourses, nor unblemished examples, nor miracles confessed to be divine, could win over to the truth.

Now if we do in good earnest desire to imitate either these wise men or those Gentiles, it must be our care to keep our ears open and our hearts teachable. We must not only see, but follow, and embrace most gladly the light that shines upon us from above, and is let down from heaven for a guide to us; comply cheerfully with every call and motion of his good Spirit; provoke, and, if possible, shame those into a noble and holy emulation who shut their eyes against it. We must not suffer ourselves to be discouraged by any hardships or dangers which our duty calls us to; nor grow cold upon the many ill examples we converse among, the general neglect of most, and the bold affronts of some, who make it an act of gallantry to insult and cast all the contempt they can upon religion; in a word, we must persevere in piety and virtue, though we were left to stand alone; and, in despite of all opprobrious treatment which they or we may meet from persons who might and should know better, and in truth do not see only be-

cause they will not. Of all this our Saviour hath shewed us the necessity, by declaring that men *cannot believe* while they prefer popular esteem before a good conscience. Which is, in Scripture language, *receiving honour one of another, not seeking that honour which cometh from God only, and loving the praise of men more than the praise of God.*

2. The last thing I observe is, the mighty satisfaction these wise men felt at the return of the star. *When they saw the star again, says the Evangelist, they rejoiced with exceeding great joy.* A joy that sprung, no doubt, from strong assurances that this was a token of their journey being well pleasing to God, and that he would prosper it to their intended purpose of seeing and adoring that wonderful Infant, whose this star was. And here again they are a pattern which we should be infinitely to blame not to copy after.

For, as the apostle upon all occasions urges, we are certainly of all creatures the most ungrateful and stupid, the most unworthy of our happiness, if we do not esteem the conversion of the Gentile world to be one of the most glorious mysteries of Providence that ever was exhibited to mankind. And our resentments of this mercy should be the more sensible and tender, because we are the offspring of those Gentiles; and our ancestors once a part of them, as dark, perhaps, as any. It is possible indeed we might not have retained the ancient rudeness and ferity of our country. From that our invaders would have soon delivered us. But, alas! how poor a consideration is it to Christians, that they have been refined into civility and good manners, taught arts and commerce, and improved in industry and learning! Allow those advantages the great value and commendation really due to them. Yet still, I say, how little and insignificant are even all these polishings in comparison of those benefits which come from the knowledge, the obedience, the hopes, and precious promises of the Gospel! The exalting our minds with this most holy faith, enlarging our ideas of God, giving us a prospect of heaven, seasoning us with a true taste of good and evil, and forming our lives upon the most perfect model of justice and holiness and order and peace, and all that can procure or preserve the tranquillity and happiness of ourselves and the whole world: this was, in a literal sense, to bring light out of darkness; and (praised be God) no part of his church is blessed with clearer and purer day than ours. This is our glory, this ought to be our joy.

Since then we also are, with these eastern forerunners, happily conducted to Christ, let us, as they did, fall down and worship him. We see him not indeed, like them, in arms and infancy, but, which is at once a tragical and yet most comfortable prospect, dying upon a cross for us, nay, rising again, ascending up on high, shedding his gifts and graces down, and perpetually at the right hand of God making intercession for us. Let us then approach with reverence, and open our treasures too; let us present him, not with gold or spices, but some-

what more becoming him to receive and us to offer, even our bodies and souls and spirits. Which, though of little value in themselves, will yet be accounted a rich and fragrant, if they be but an humble and an holy sacrifice; the only effectual sacrifice of thanksgiving; and an oblation, which cannot more please him than it will profit us. For by such a *reasonable service*, by such undissembled testimonies of praise and gladness it is that we must hope God will be inclined to accept and answer the proper petition of this festival; even that he, *who by the leading of a star did manifest his only begotten Son to the Gentiles, would mercifully grant that we, which know him now by faith, may after this life have the fruition of his glorious Godhead, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.*

THE FIRST SUNDAY AFTER THE EPIPHANY.

THE COLLECT.

O LORD, we beseech thee mercifully to receive the prayers of thy people which call upon thee; and grant that they may both perceive and know what things they ought to do, and also may have grace and power faithfully to fulfil the same; through Jesus Christ our Lord^a. Amen.

THE EPISTLE. Rom. xii. 1.

I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. 1. Since then the goodness of God is so exceeding great, as the former part of this Epistle hath shewed, (in making all men capable of salvation by the righteousness of faith, delivering us from the rigour and bondage of the law, and admitting Gentiles as well as Jews to be partakers of the Gospel-covenant,) let me conjure you, by this goodness, to offer and dedicate to God your persons, a living (instead of the formerly dead) sacrifice, a pure and holy (as those were without blemish) and acceptable (for its own sake, which those were not). For this will be an oblation of a rational, as those were of brute and irrational creatures, and proceeds upon rational motives.

2 And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God. 2. The manner of doing this must be by renouncing the sinful affections and customs of the men of this world, and being changed

^a Rom. xii. 2; Coloss. i. 9; Phil. ii. 13; Heb. xiii. 22.

into new men by pure and spiritual affections; that so ye may discern and delight in and practise those precepts of substantial and complete holiness enjoined by the Gospel. And in order hereunto,

3 *For I say, through the grace given unto me, to every man that is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think; but to think soberly, according as God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith.* 3. I (by virtue of that authority reposed in me as the Apostle of Christ) do admonish each of you not to set too high a value upon himself, nor to despise others, but to be content with that part and station which the providence of God and the gifts vouchsafed him have allotted to his share.

4 *For as we have many members in one body, and all members have not the same office:* 4. For as it is in the natural, so is it likewise in the mystical body:

5 *So we, being many, are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another.* 5. There the members are many, but united under one head, and mutually related to each other; here again the persons are many, but all united in Christ. And, though some be higher and some lower, some more and some less active and honourable; yet still this difference of place and office does not hinder the mutual relation that there is, and the mutual help and usefulness that there ought to be, even between those that are most distant in either of the respects above mentioned.

COMMENT.

The church, when appointing this portion of Scripture, treads exactly in the steps of the blessed Apostle that wrote it. He in the foregoing chapters had vindicated, explained, and given due honour to the wisdom and the mercies of God manifested in the glorious privileges and universal extent of the Gospel dispensation; and now he proceeds to shew what the effect of these considerations ought to be upon the minds and lives of all who have embraced it. She in like manner, from celebrating the goodness of that God in the conversion of and manifestation of his Son and his truth to the Gentiles, makes it her next care to press the same practical doctrine, and thereby to insinuate the absolute necessity of *walking worthy of the vocation wherewith we are called*. *I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, &c.*

That holiness and virtue, and every good word and work abounding in us, ought to be the fruit of our clearer knowledge, and that the mercies of God exhibited to Christians are a motive, not only proper and natural, but sufficiently strong for that purpose, hath, I hope, been plainly and largely enough demonstrated in a late discourse. The chapter now before us is designed to specify the particular good qualities they are expected to produce. Which the Apostle hath

here so artfully illustrated, that it may very well be looked upon as a perfect, though so short a body of Christian morality. The explaining and urging these several duties as they deserve is an attempt at present impracticable, it being inconsistent with the bounds that ought to be set to meditations of this kind. But in regard St. Paul reminds us of one consideration, from whence an obligation follows to every one (I think) of the virtues here enjoined, I will make it my endeavour so to insist upon that, as to answer the end at last, though I do not industriously treat of every part of the chapter.

This method I the rather choose, because in other parts of the New Testament we find the same argument so frequently and solemnly insisted on as to prove the weight of it, and withal upon such occasions and to such purposes as seem abundantly to justify the consequences I am about to draw from it. This will appear to any who shall diligently compare this twelfth to the Romans with that of the first Epistle to the ^d Corinthians and the fourth to the ^e Ephesians : which passages I shall, as I find occasion, call into my assistance for the better illustrating and enforcing that which I am now taking in hand.

The foundation then of my discourses upon the Epistles for this and the two following Sundays shall be laid in those words at the fourth and fifth verses ; *For as we have many members in one body, and all members have not the same office ; so we, being many, are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another.* That these words have a retrospect to and are a reason for the duties that went before, is plain by the connexion of the fourth with the third verse, and the division of the Epistle of the day which they close up. That they are manifestly the ground of those that follow, is clear from the beginning of the sixth verse, and may be yet more so from the reason of the thing.

Now the improvement I design to make of this passage will fall under the two following heads :

First, the nature of this union and mutual relation declared here.

Secondly, the obligations arising from thence upon the parties so united and related.

I. First, the nature of this union and mutual relation declared here will be best discerned by the several passages of Scripture making mention of it. The principal whereof, besides that we are now treating of, are these that follow : *As the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body ; so also is Christ : for by one spirit we are all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free ; and have been all made to drink into one spirit. For the body is not one member, but many. Now ye are the body of Christ, and members in particular. The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ ? For we being many, are one bread and one body ; for we are all partakers of that one bread. God hath put all things under his (Christ's) feet, and gave him to be the head over all things to the*

^d 1 Cor. xii.

^e Ephes. iv.

^f 1 Cor. xii. 12, 13, 14.

^g Ver. 27.

^h 1 Cor. x. 16, 17.

ⁱ Eph. i. 22, 23.

church, which is the body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all. ^k That the Gentiles should be fellow-heirs, and of the same body, and partakers of his promise in Christ, by the Gospel. ^l There is one body, and one spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all. ^m That we may grow up into him in all things which is the head, even Christ; from whom the whole body fitly joined together, and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase in the body unto the edifying of itself in love; ⁿ for we are members one of another. ^o The head of every man is Christ. ^p Christ is the head of the church, and he is the Saviour of the body. ^q For we are members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones. So again, ^r He is the head of the body, the church: whose doctrine and unity they who depart from are said not to ^s hold the head, from which all the body, by joints and bands having nourishment ministered and knit together, increaseth with the increase of God.

I have chosen to set these several texts before you in one view by reason of the mutual illustration they give to each other; and that from all, thus taken and compared together, the inferences may more easily be drawn which are necessary for establishing the point now in hand. In particular, what sort of union this we are speaking of is, what are the grounds or bands of it, and how the metaphor is answered by the mutual relation between the several parts concerned in the similitude.

1. As first, no doubt at all can be made but that this, above all other allusions, was intended to figure the near, the inseparable, the entire concern and interest we have in our blessed Lord and in one another. When called fellow-soldiers, we are represented as so many engaged in the same common cause, and listed to serve under the same leader: when fellow-servants, as belonging to the same family: when sons, as descended from one father: when heirs, as partaking in the rights and claims of the same elder brother: but when members of the same body, this is the closest of all the rest, for it scarce leaves us the liberty, which all the rest do, of considering ourselves any longer as distinct persons. It presents us with an image of every one thus cemented being a part of Christ, and every Christian a part of our ourselves; as if he without us, and we without them, must want that perfection of being which the nature of a body requires.

2. Secondly, it is very manifest from hence that this union is peculiar to Christians. From hence it is that we find the church so often mentioned as Christ's body. Consequently, as they who are not of the church are not of the body, so what methods soever those be which have been instituted, as instruments and means for grafting men into, or signifying their continuance and common rights in, the congregation of Christians, the same make them members of, and the denial or the want of the same excludes them from any part in this body.

^k Chap. iii. 6. ^l Chap. iv. 4, 5, 6. ^m Ver. 15, 16. ⁿ Ver. 24. ^o 1 Cor. xi. 3.
^p Ephes. v. 23. ^q Ver. 30. ^r Coloss. i. 18. ^s Chap. ii. 19.

3. Hence it comes to pass, thirdly, that in the passages above cited we find such express mention not only of the same principles of religion, the same laws, the same privileges of grace, the same hopes of glory, but of the same sacraments too, as necessary attestations of our confessing and submitting to the former, and entitling us to a reasonable expectance of the latter. For nothing less than this can be the meaning of those texts, *1 One Lord, one faith, one baptism.* *2 By one spirit we are all baptized into one body, and have been all made to drink into one spirit:* and, *3 We, being many, are one bread, and one body; for we are all partakers of that one bread.* So vain and presumptuous is the delusion of those who, because they call Christ Lord, and profess to believe the doctrine he hath taught, arrogate to themselves the name and privileges of Christians, without that initiating sacrament of baptism which he hath ordained as the instrument of making them members of his visible body. So profane, so pernicious is the neglect of that other confirming sacrament, the blessed supper of our Lord, ordained by him likewise for their strength and nourishment, and necessary to preserve them true members of his invisible body.

4. For it is fit we be put in mind, fourthly, that it is one thing to have the appearance and external privileges, and another to discharge the part and attain all the benefits of this union. As the Apostle says in a like case, *4 All are not Israel that are of Israel*, so our Saviour supposes that *5 many who call him Lord will not do the things which he commands.* Now matters are in some proportion with this mystical as with our natural body. An arm or a leg may be stupified with a palsy or a lethargy, an eye may be out, or an ear deaf, and these still keep their place, though not their use in the body. And thus a number of careless or profane or hypocritical professors shall retain the name and fill up the room of members by virtue of those outward signs and sacraments which placed them in the body of Christ, while yet they want that inward holiness which those sacraments are emblems of and engagements to, which alone can render them of a piece with the head, and wherein not only the health but the very life of the body and each member of it consists. Now because this consists chiefly in the disposition of the mind, and consequently may be sometimes greater than appears, and at other times may by a false and pompous show be made to appear where it really is not; hence it must needs follow, that many may and ought to enjoy the privileges and the common estimation of members who strictly are not so, because the persons intrusted with the power of admitting into and cutting off from this body may be imposed upon by such dissimulation, and can only proceed upon outward appearances. But then it follows too, that since *6 the Lord knoweth them that are his*, these presumptive members shall certainly be disowned by, as in truth they are not united to him. Hence so many pressing exhortations to men acknowledged for *saints and brethren and members*, to walk worthy of those titles, to be in

^t Ephes. iv. 5.

^u 1 Cor. xii. 13.

^z Luke vi. 46.

^x Chap. x. 17.

^a 2 Tim. ii. 19.

^y Rom. ix. 6.

truth what they are in profession and show and general repute; hence that very substantial distinction of the visible and invisible members and body of Christ, and the difference of those qualifications necessary for each. A distinction founded in the nature of things, which cannot be otherwise, while this body upon earth is composed of and governed by men capable of deceiving and of being deceived; while this field must be content to hold ^btares with the wheat, till that harvest and those reapers come which are appointed to make the final separation.

5. From hence it is evident, fifthly, that a very considerable difference is to be made between the several instances of union mentioned and recommended in scripture; that some are absolutely necessary to the being, others enjoined as expedient to the growth and wellbeing of this body. Of the former sort are the submitting to the same *Lord*, agreeing in the fundamentals of the same *faith*, and, as a mark of this submission and agreement, administration of the same *sacraments*. Of the latter, that holiness of life, that exemplariness of practice, that mutual charity and concord, that peaceableness and order, that consent in discipline, that ready compliance in all lawful matters, which, though not essential, shall yet (by the constitution of particular churches, and the judgment of persons thought proper to give rules in such cases) be enjoined as proper for decency and edification. Which authority, being derived from our Lord upon his apostles, and from them upon their successors, in the government of this society so incorporated, the contempt of it is a contempt of him, and a breach of that union which every Christian is bound to preserve under all the penalty those declarations of our Master can be supposed to involve every wilful violater of it in: *“As my Father hath sent me, even so send I you: and, He that despiseth you despiseth me; and he that despiseth me despiseth him that sent me.”*

6. But that part of this union which we are in a more especial manner concerned to observe is, sixthly, that between all these members and Christ; whom we find in the texts above cited to be represented as their common head. And this resemblance is made good with allusion to our natural body, not merely as he took upon him our human nature, and so became one with us and head over us, in a sense different from that in which he is said to be the head over the angels, or any other creature; but more especially in regard of that order and preeminence, that perfection and power of influencing, that care of directing, that right of governing, that constant protection of and perpetual presence with the several parts of this mystical, which answer to the dignity and excellence, the communications and continual distributions, the command, and the contrivance and intimate conjunction of the head in the frame of our natural body. These are particulars which require the greater attention, by reason of that usefulness they are of towards making men sensible what duties this relation obliges to. And therefore it may be convenient to take

^b Matt. xiii. 30.

^c John xx. 21; Luke x. 16.

notice what care the Holy Ghost hath bestowed to explain and illustrate them to us in Scripture.

1. As first. Our Saviour is very fitly termed our Head, as that implies dignity of station, superiority of place, and preeminence over the rest of the body. How great honour we think due to this above any other part of our natural composition, no one needs be told; and how deservedly we think so, is very obvious to any who at all consider the nobleness of its contexture, the richness of its treasures, the variety of its operations. Insomuch that all our highest faculties are seated here, all the senses exercised, and all but one, the meanest of the number, exercised here alone. Upon which and many other accounts it seems to claim the situation nature gives it, a preference before and presidence over the whole body.

Such and much more wonderful are the perfections of our mystical head; resplendent and glorions above all imagination; so exquisito, that the utmost happiness in reserve for the best and most beloved of his members is, to be wrought up to such resemblance of him as the infinite distance between God and man will admit. And in this respect the Apostle seems to have intended that noble description of his excellences, when calling him *the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of every creature, the head of the body, the church; the beginning and the firstborn from the dead; that in all things he might have the preeminence: because it pleased the Father that in him should all fulness dwell.*

2. This union between Christ and the church is justified, socondly, by the saving influences and perpetual communications derived down upon the body. The head in our natural frame is the storehouse, the workhouse, in which are formed every moment, and laid up for use, those animal spirits that maintain life and motion and sense. And the constant regular distribution of these is so necessary, that if the passages to any part happen to be intercepted, that part becomes presently useless and dead: and if those stores run low, there follow immediately faintings and swoonings, a state of inactivity for the time, and, without seasonable recruits, when quite exhausted, the death of the man.

In like manner, with regard to the principles of our spiritual life, Christ is (if I may so speak) the comunon magazine of all our powers. *The head, says St. Paul, from which all the body, by joints and bands having nourishment ministered and knit together, increaseth with the increase of God.* The plain importance whereof is thus much; that, as the natural body owes its growth and vigour to the continual supplies of spirits from the head; and as the ligatures of arteries and veins, muselos and joints, are so many pipes laid each in proper position for conveying those into the limbs for strength and motion, and mutual ease and help, and for diffusing of nourishment through the whole mass of flesh and blood, according to the capacity of each vessel and part; so the church's health and increase proceed from the kindly

influences which Christ is pleased to shed down upon it; and the piety and charity of Christians are vital operations, corresponding to and naturally resulting from such influences duly received. Hence St. John, *'Of his fulness have we all received grace:* and St. Paul, *'I can do all things through Christ that strengtheneth me.* And how entirely our living or dying, in a religious sense, depends upon such communications or the withdrawing of them, our blessed Lord himself hath fully acquainted us in another figurative illustration, exactly parallel to the point we are now upon. *'As the branch, says he, cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me. I am the vine, ye are the branches: he that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing.* What can possibly be a more express proof of the mutual union, the constant communication between Christ and his church, and consequently the exceeding fitness of this similitude, proceeding from our natural to his mystical body? Thus do the life and health and strength and sense and motion of a Christian, as such, require his benign influences as absolutely needful for their support and respective functions. Thus are all these as certainly interrupted, as effectually destroyed, upon the obstruction or withholding of those influences, as the man acts and moves when his spirits are liberally and regularly dispensed, but falls into a palsy or an apoplexy, faints away and dies, when their course is intercepted and disturbed, or their stock spent and quite drawn off.

3. The analogy between Christ's mystical and our natural body holds with regard to his right of directing and governing. The business of the head is to advise and command; this is the seat of the soul, and the several faculties of the other parts are determined by its appointment. Such is the authority of our Lord, manifest, as from sundry other texts, so particularly from that to the Ephesians: *'The husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church; therefore as the church is subject unto Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in every thing.* But of the significance of the figure in this respect no enlargement can be needful; since it is so universally acknowledged, that no scheme of speech is either more familiarly used or more perfectly understood than that, whereby supreme governors in any kind are styled the heads of them who submit to their respective jurisdictions.

4. Once more. The metaphor is answered by his care for, protection of, and inseparable conjunction with his members. For such is the case of our natural head; it contrives for, consults the safety of, and lives with the body. And such is the case of our mystical head, who is therefore termed *'the Saviour of the body, the nourisher and cherisher of the church.* Hence Saul, who *'persecuted the church,* is accused of persecuting him: hence we are said to be *'made alive in Christ:* hence that most comfortable declaration to his disciples, *'Because I live, ye shall live also;* and that other to his Father, *The*

^f John i. 16.

^k Eph. v. 23, 30.

^g Phil. iv. 13.

ⁱ Acts ix. 4.

^h John xv. 4, 5.

^m 1 Cor. xv. 22.

^j Eph. v. 23, 24.

ⁿ John xiv. 19.

glory which thou gavest me I have given them, that they may be one, even as we are one. I in them, and thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one. In a word, as the sufferings and the benefits, the safety and the dangers in our persons, are common to head and trunk both, and as the severing of these two infers the death of the whole; so our Lord permits us to believe all our interests and all our calamities, all our comforts and all our sorrows, his; to promise ourselves immortality and glory, because he is already possessed of both, not only in his own, but in the right of every actual and true member of his; and to look upon him and his bliss as in some sense imperfect without the participation of that *church which is his body*; and therefore must share the same fate with its *head*, which is *his fulness*, and consequently not to be parted from him that *filleth all in all*.

The sum is this. The allusion now before us is designed to insinuate the closest union to Christ and to one another that can be; the latter by calling us one body, the former by calling us one body in him. That thus we are made by the profession of one faith, by partaking of one Spirit, by the regeneration of one baptism, and by submitting to one Lord. That these are necessary to the very being of this body, and giving men any place in it: but that to the well-being of it a great deal more is necessary. The discharging those duties which that Lord commands, which that baptism engages for, which that Spirit is ready to assist them in, which that faith expects as agreeable fruits of its principles. That they who fail in this are but outwardly and imperfectly, but they who do the part and office of members, are spiritually, actually, and savingly united in the body of the saints to Christ their common head. Deservedly styled our head, for his excellent dignity above, for his constant and liberal influences upon, for his commanding power over, and for his tender care of and presence with the members of this body. Such is our union, such our mutual relation; most endearing, most honourable, most happy, provided we be careful to improve upon and fulfil the purposes of it. In order whereunto it is that I propose, under my

II. Second head, to consider the obligations arising from hence upon the parties thus united and related. In this consideration my thoughts must be guided by the particulars which St. Paul hath laid before me: and because these are set down in great variety and promiscuous manner, for the containing what I have to say within due bounds, and treating of the subjects more distinctly, it may be convenient to observe the general topics of virtue to which the precepts are reducible; and then to treat of those, not in all their latitude of obligation, but only so far forth as this union now in hand is a proper argument for recommending them to or binding them upon us.

Now the portion of this chapter at present directed to employ your meditations mentions three, which I shall endeavour first of all to explain, and then to shew how our being members in the body of Christ enforces the practice of them: both as clearly and as briefly as I can.

1. The first of these is mortification of our sensual appetites, with

which St. Paul begins his exhortation, when beseeching these Romans, by *the mercies of God, to present their bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which (says he) is your reasonable service.* Advice in substance the same with that to the Ephesians on a like occasion, *I beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called;* and to the Colossians, after declaring our union with Christ, *Mortify therefore your members which are on the earth: the equity whereof he had urged upon the Romans in the former part of this Epistle, As ye have yielded your members servants to uncleanness and to iniquity unto iniquity, even so now yield your members servants to righteousness unto holiness.* But though these places be in substance the same, yet is there a particular energy in the expressions here before us which deserves to be taken notice of.

The Apostle had been demonstrating the excellence of the evangelical above the legal institution, and, with allusion to the way of worship used in that, he advises Christians to *present a sacrifice too:* but this consisting not of the bodies of beasts, but of their own bodies. The thing therefore offered here is still alive; and yet there is somewhat in the matter that bears some resemblance and proportion to the slaying of victims heretofore: because, by subduing our vicious inclinations, which are the incentives to impurity and all manner of wickedness, the *body of sin* (as we find it very frequently and emphatically called) *is destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin.* By thus *cleansing ourselves from all filthiness both of flesh and spirit,* we answer the spiritual intent of that law which incapacitated all beasts for the use of the altar wherein any blemish or defect was discovered; we render this *living a holy sacrifice*, qualified for the acceptance of God; and therefore so, because as the reason of the thing demands it from us, so the value of the oblation is greatly enhanced by being that of a rational creature, consecrated and devoted entirely to his service, separated from common and profane uses, and not, without the guilt of sacrilege, to be afterwards employed in the gratification of our own lusts, when the whole right of what we bring to God hath been thus solemnly transferred from ourselves to him.

This, in effect, hath been already done by every Christian, from the moment of his being made such in the sacrament of baptism; wherein we all renounce the *carnal desires of the flesh, so that we will not follow nor be led by them.* A sacrament representing to us our profession, which is to imitate the example of our Saviour Christ, and to be made like unto him; that, as he died and rose again for us, so we who are baptized into the belief of that death and resurrection should die from sin, and rise again unto righteousness, continually mortifying all our evil and corrupt affections, and daily proceeding in all virtue and godliness of living. This is an act of religion repeated and confirmed by every one as oft as he receives that other sacrament of the Lord's Supper, where we again *offer and present unto God ourselves, our souls and bodies, to be a reasonable, holy, and lively sacrifice unto him.* In the meanwhile,

o Rom. xii. 1.

p Eph. iv. 1.

q Col. iii. 5.

r Rom. vi. 19.

* Rom. vi. 6.

2 Cor. vii. 1.

u Bapt. Service.

x Communion Service.

though this dedication convey over the whole of our persons, yet was it proper and sufficient for the Apostle to mention the offering of our *bodies*; because our bodies are the instruments of committing those sins from which it was intended to debar us: because the seeking and gratification of bodily pleasures is the end which the appetites pushing on to those sins propose to themselves: and therefore, as the persons indulging them are very significantly said to *sin against their own body*, so the keeping this body in subjection to the reasonable mind, and employing it in the exercises of religion and severe virtue, (by all that abstinence and other hardships and self-denials necessary for this purpose,) is offering not it alone, but our whole selves to God. For (as I said) in it the whole cause and end and instrument of our corruption is included, and not to *serve the body* is in effect and certain consequence *not to serve sin*. So that when this servant of sin is itself sanctified, and devoted a servant to righteousness, the very principle of moral actions is changed, the dominion of death spiritual subverted, the matter upon which temptations work withdrawn, and by making our *body* as well as *spirit* God's, the fruit is *his glory* and our own *holiness* in both spirit and body; which leads me to the second thing enjoined,

2. *Newness of heart and life*. For that is the substance of the next verse,—^a *And be not conformed to this world, but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God*. Counsel necessary to the perfecting that virtue, which the last particular begins, and both together of a like importance with that to the Ephesians, ^b *That ye put off, concerning the former conversation, the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts; and be renewed in the spirit of your mind; and that ye put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness*.

By the former conversation in the one, and conformity to this world in the other of those texts, is not forbidden all sort of compliance with the lawful and innocent customs in use, (as if it were a duty in Christians to distinguish themselves by a dress or demeanour fantastical and singular,) but only the not suffering ourselves to give into the false judgments or the prevailing fashions of the men of the world; so far as any of these either are themselves, or may to us become the probable occasion of any thing that is sinful. In short, with the men who have no view beyond, no principle of governing their actions, but the profits or honours or pleasures of this world, we must not consent in opinion, we must not join in practice; no prospect of interest, no influence of example and common usage must bias us, no, not the natural bent of our own mind. But having entirely offered up ourselves to God, there is no taking back part and dividing the oblation between him and mammon. The virtue of that new turn given to our thoughts and affections, and that different judgment of things wrought in our hearts by the grace of God and our own pious endeavours, will and must make us quite another sort of men. Creatures as

^a 1 Cor. vi. 18.^b 1 Cor. vi. 20; Rom. vi. 22.^c Ver. 3.^d Ephes. iv. 22, 23, 24.

much new and changed, as the condition of a reasonable mind can admit; and such as for the future allow no rule of action, no measure of good and evil, of wisdom and folly, but the Gospel. Which was intended to complete our holiness, and recommend us effectually to the favour and love of God.

The third thing we are concerned with, as enjoined in this day's Epistle, is humility; for this is the virtue St. Paul aims at, when saying to every man, *not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think soberly, according as God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith.* These words are by some supposed a caution against curiosity in matters of religion, and affecting to be wise in unprofitable parts of knowledge. But it seems more agreeable to the Apostle's purpose, to understand that vanity and overvaluing of a man's self, which are so very apt to grow upon us when we feel ourselves superior to others, in any sort of commendable quality. Such were exceeding remarkable in many of the primitive church, who were distinguished by extraordinary gifts of the Spirit. And because those gifts were differently distributed, both as to kind and to degree, the fault and folly of men's preferring those of one kind above the rest, or being immoderately exalted upon higher and contemning those who had received lower measures of the same kind, is here condemned and forbidden.

This I conceive to be the meaning of the three foregoing verses, and these the virtues pressed upon us in them. It remains only that I shew how they are enforced by this consideration of our being united as one body in Christ, which a very few words may suffice to do.

That the first of them is so, which consists in mortifying the sensual and carnal appetites, and consecrating our bodies to the service of God, I need no other proof than this Apostle's own authority, who thus endeavours to create in the Corinthians a particular abhorrence of unclean lusts. *Know ye not, says he, that your bodies are the members of Christ? Shall I then take the members of Christ, and make them the members of an harlot? God forbid.* And farther yet, to make them sensible that this argument ought to take place, not only against the gross acts of impurity, but even all pollution of the thoughts and desires, he proceeds, *What, know ye not that he which is joined to an harlot is one body? But he that is joined unto the Lord is one spirit.* You see, by the very manner of the Apostle, how exceeding contrary to, how utterly unbecoming our character any sinful indulgence in carnal pleasures is. So manifestly thus, that he does not descend to a cool and formal argument, but turns the matter off with scorn and detestation, and represents it so absurd and monstrous, that a man must be perfectly stupid not to perceive the horrid vileness and incongruity of it.

And sure, if we go to the reason of the thing, this single reflection ought to have great weight with us. For if the moralists of old could discern the reasonableness of restraining, denying, despising those

^c 1 Cor. vi. 15.

^d Ver. 16, 17.

vicious gratifications which degrade us and our nature, how much more just is a Christian's abstinence and disdain, who cannot debase himself alone, but at the same time commits an indignity upon Christ! Surely he ought to treat his own person as a member belonging to that head, to respect a *body which is the temple of the Holy Ghost*: not to prostitute a thing so sacred and venerable to the filthiness of brutes, nor invade the property of that God to whom he hath the honour by so manifold a title to belong.

2. The second, of a *new heart and life*, is no less evident a consequence of this union. For since we know that *Christ abideth in us, and we in him, by the Spirit he hath given us*; since his Spirit is here distinguished from a worldly spirit, his kingdom from the kingdoms of this world; it follows, that to retain the one of these is to declare we have nothing to do with the other; and that to make the one our aim and end is to abandon the other. As Christ is then our head with regard to his directive power, we must see to the keeping that correspondence which appears in nature. The ready consent of every faculty to execute what the head contrives and appoints, the nimble sallies of our animal spirits, that fly we know not how, as swift as thought through every nerve, and instantly move the most distant limbs of our bodies, these are lively emblems of that ready and cheerful conformity which should be paid this mystical Head, in every instance of his will signified to us, whether by precept or his own example. Hence we are told of every *thought being brought to the obedience of Christ*. That so in this, as in our ordinary composition, no such thing as rebellion may be known. For if at any time the dictates of the soul be not obeyed, this comes to pass through weakness and indisposition, sometimes for want of power, but never for want of will. But not to have the like mind in us that was in Christ Jesus, is to suppose two spirits and two contrary wills, which quite destroys the notion of one and the same body. And therefore all who would maintain this union must make his will theirs, and have no opinions, no affections, no delights of their own; but in all things be transformed into and (as the Scripture expresses it) *put on Christ*.

3. Of the third, which is humility, there can remain no doubt, since this allusion of a body is urged by the Apostle as an express reason for it. But of this more hereafter.

The short is: As the principles of natural vigour and motion and sensation are dispensed from the head, as from a common font, through these bodies of flesh, so are the graces of the Spirit from Christ. But with this difference, that his distributions are not mechanical, but voluntary, and entirely free. These therefore are derived down in such quality and proportion as his wisdom sees fit for the common exigencies and benefit. They are not the effect of ours, but the overflowings of his goodness. And therefore our part is to dispose ourselves for giving them a meek and thankful reception, to improve under them, to admire and adore the kindness of the giver; but often

to beat down those unseasonable and dangerous self-complacencies (which any partial and distinguishing bounty in our favour is so ready to blow up) with a—5 *Who hath made thee to differ from another? And what hast thou, that thou hast not received? Now if thou didst receive it, why dost thou glory, as if thou hadst not received it?* And especially, it will become us to remember with great seriousness, that the issue upon which every Christian's fate will turn at last is not the quantity of what he receives, but the use or the neglect of it, the answering or defeating the purposes for which it was bestowed. Which leads us to another ^hinference drawn from this comparison, and will come under our consideration the next Lord's day.

THE FIRST SUNDAY AFTER THE EPIPHANY.

THE GOSPEL. St. Luke ii. 41.

41 *Now his parents went to Jerusalem every year at the feast of the passover.*

42 *And when he was twelve years old, they went up to Jerusalem after the custom of the feast.*

three solemn feasts every year, of which *Exod. xxiii. 15, 17. Levit. xxiii. Deut. xvi.* Upon which occasion the females (though not expressed) were not excluded, but frequently attended also; and their children, when capable of understanding the intent of those festivals, were bound to it.

43 *And when they had fulfilled the days, as they returned, the child Jesus tarried behind in Jerusalem; and Joseph and his mother knew not of it.*

44 *But they, supposing him to have been in the company, went a day's journey; and they sought him among their kinsfolk and acquaintance.*

45 *And when they found him not, they turned back again to Jerusalem, seeking him.*

46 *And it came to pass, that after three days they found him in the temple, sitting in the midst of the doctors, both hearing them, and asking them questions.*

47 *And all that heard him were astonished at his understanding and answers.* and expound publicly. With whom he conferred, to the admiration of all people present.

41, 42. His parents diligently observed that law, which expressly required the attendance of all the males at Jerusalem, to celebrate the passover was one. See

Upon which occasion the females (though not expressed) were not excluded, but frequently attended also; and their children, when capable of understanding the

43. This solemnity lasted seven days, at the expiration whereof Joseph and Mary began their journey back to Nazareth.

45. Not hearing of him upon the inquiry made, (ver. 44.) the second day they went back.

46, 47. The third day (computed from their setting out homeward) they found him in that part of the temple where the learned in the law used to teach

48 *And when they saw him, they were amazed: and his mother said unto him, Son, why hast thou thus dealt with us? behold, thy father and I have sought thee sorrowing.*

49 *And he said unto them, How is it that ye sought me? wist ye not that I must be about my Father's business?*

50 *And they understood not the saying which he spake unto them.*

51 *And he went down with them, and came to Nazareth, and was subject unto them: but his mother kept all these sayings in her heart.*

of these things passed without the particular observation and remembrance of his mother.

52 *And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man.* in his mind to maturity of judgment, as well as in his body to the full proportion of a man, by gradual and visible accessions of both, like other youths; and behaved himself so as to engage the general love and approbation of all sorts of people.

48. This was a sight very surprising to them, and his mother, out of the vehemence of her affection, expostulated with him about what had passed.

49. To whom his answer was, that a son was nowhere so properly as in his father's house, nor so fitly employed as about his father's affairs.

50. The meaning of this answer they did not perfectly comprehend.

51. Hereupon he bore them company home, and submitted to their authority like common sons. But none

of these things passed without the particular observation and remembrance of his mother.

52. Meanwhile Jesus grew in his mind to maturity of judgment, as well as in his body to the full proportion of a man, by gradual and visible accessions of both, like other youths; and behaved himself so as to engage the general love and approbation of all sorts of people.

COMMENT.

The Gospel for this day deserves our very particular consideration, because containing all the account thought fit by the Holy Ghost to be given us of our blessed Saviour's life from his infancy to his baptism, and the entrance upon his prophetic office. A little compass of words for so long a tract of time, and chiefly confined to one single occasion; but that such as furnishes a great deal of matter for useful reflection and practice. And to these purposes it should be our endeavour to improve it, with regard to the following instances particularly.

1. The forty-first and forty-second verses take notice how religiously Joseph and Mary observed the passover; that the distance of their dwelling did not hinder their resorting to Jerusalem yearly for the celebration of it; that in this Mary joined too, though not obliged to it by the letter of the law; and that when Jesus arrived at the age of twelve years, he was taken thither with them. What obligations they lay under for their own attendance, the texts referred to in the paraphrase shew. The carrying up of Jesus seems to have had more immediate respect to those ordinances which required all Israelites to instruct their children diligently in the knowledge of the law, and

especially in the reasons for which the Passover and the rest of their great solemnities were instituted.

Now the Virgin and Joseph, by their punctual compliance in both these cases, have set an excellent example to parents of all ages and places. An example which, grounded on the express command of God, should make them sensible of how great importance it is that they who govern families be conscientious in frequenting God's public worship themselves; that they go before their children, and by their own behaviour encourage them to follow in the ways of piety and virtue; that they season their tender years with early notions of good and evil, let them into a right understanding of religion, by such methods and in such degrees as the greenness of that age is capable of. Particularly (which comes nearest to the case before us) to turn all their childish curiosity to profit, by explaining to them the occasion of the Christian festivals; begetting in them an early reverence for the glorious mysteries, and a becoming value for the invaluable benefits of our redemption. In short, that they would, from the very first, make them their companions in the service of God, and imprint upon this soft wax such strong and lasting characters of his majesty and goodness, such an habitual awe and love of him and his commands, as may serve for a foundation to build a wise and holy life upon. Such as may preserve their riper years from the contagion of irreligion and vice, direct their choice, and secure their perseverance by habits of goodness and exemplary improvements in religious prudence, still aspiring nearer perfection to the end of their days.

2. The three following verses take notice of Jesus staying behind, and the anxious concern of his parents upon that occasion. Which some have imputed to a fear of his falling into ill hands, who, by destroying him, might defeat the expectation of the glorious things God sent him into the world to accomplish. But I conceive it much more reasonable to ascribe that concern to the natural tenderness of a mother, and the frights and confusions which the missing a beloved child, in whose company they above all things delighted, uses to produce upon so unexpected an accident. And the duty I would recommend from hence is, kindness and affection to our children, a quick and tender sense of their sufferings and dangers, and a very solicitous care for their safety and happiness.

I know not well what may at first be thought of my pretending so solemnly to excite a disposition which nature seems to have provided effectually for already, by planting it even in the fiercest and wildest of beasts. It hath indeed done this, and in such manner that those very brutes are a reproach to many men, who behave themselves as if reason were given to harden their hearts, and render them but so much less gentle and sensible. For it is really prodigious to see how some, even who profess themselves Christians, can lay aside all bowels, and forget every thing of care and compassion for their own flesh: such indifference, such stupidity, nay, such remorseless cruelties, such blows, such revilings, such bitter curses, heard and seen betwixt the nearest relations, as would even tempt us to suspect the power of rea-

son and religion for working us into softer and better tempers, had not Christ and his apostles foretold, ^k*that in the last days* some should so obstinately stand it out against the force of both, as ^l*to hate and betray* their own offspring, to become ^m*cold in love*, and absolutely void of natural affection.

But, when foretelling this, they signify withal that *the abounding of iniquity* is the cause of it, and that those are the very dregs of time, by giving the coming of such things to pass for a mark of the worst as well as the last days. Since then such unnatural things are practicable however, and plainly possible at least, it cannot misbecome me to press a duty which, though nature hath universally implanted a disposition to, yet the corruption of human nature hath the scandal of being too often proof against. And indeed I the rather choose to recommend this tenderness for our children, so remarkable and eminent in God and good men, because a due observance of this particular will exceedingly contribute to the success of the former. It will quicken our concern for their best and most valuable part; it will make our care of their souls more earnest and vigorous, and it will prepare the way for its being better accepted too. For the first step to persuasion is to possess men with an opinion that we heartily love them. And a command is half obeyed when once the party is thoroughly convinced that what we require is not for the sake of exercising a despotic power, or from a delight to lay heavy burdens, but from a sense of its being necessary to their happiness, and because we zealously desire their good. Now considering how much more this world affects the generality of people than that which is to come, the parent who does not first approve himself tender of his children's body, and its present comforts and conveniences, will never be able to get himself believed when professing the kindest resentments and most impatient wishes for the safety and happiness of their souls.

3. But to proceed. If the trouble of these parents was great for the absence of so dear a child, their joy must needs be doubled by meeting him again, not only safe, but engaged in an employment so very promising, so very becoming, so much above his years. For the forty-sixth verse says, *They found him in the temple, sitting in the midst of the doctors, both hearing them and asking them questions.* And this, it is probable, he might do, not merely out of curiosity, but to acquit himself of a duty expected from all who attained to a certain age among the Jews. For they who have taken pains in examining their institutions and customs observe this commendable one to have obtained among the rest, ⁿ*that their youth were brought before some masters of the synagogue to render an account of their proficiency in religion, and from thenceforth to be answerable for their own sins; o**that this was a ceremony performed with strict examination, with devout prayers, and solemn benedictions.*

All which, as it very nearly resembles, so may it seem to have ministered some ground to the Christian rite of confirmation. Where-

^k Matt. x. 21.

^l Chap. xxiv. 12.

^m 2 Tim. iii. 2.

ⁿ See Grof. in locum.

^o Buxtorf. Synagog. Judaic. cap. 3.

in, after having answered to the first and most necessary rudiments of faith and practice, our young people, in presence of the fathers of the church, and with the blessing of God by these implored upon their future endeavours, do take the charge of their baptismal vow upon themselves, as being presumed sufficiently instructed to be responsible for their own duty the remaining part of their lives. A very learned man supposes our Lord to have stayed behind for this purpose. Which though others were not usually called upon to do till thirteen, yet he might do it at twelve years old; the particular season then in use being accommodated to the capacities and attainments of children in general, but not forbidding those of extraordinary qualifications from doing it earlier when competently prepared, and of a genius which (to speak in the Jews' own phrase) did *run before the command*.

4. However this be, (for I am content to leave it as a probable conjecture only,) yet thus much is certain, that he in those conferences behaved himself, not only to the satisfaction, but the wonder of the whole assembly; *For all that heard him were astonished at his understanding and answers*. In which, notwithstanding, we are not to imagine all the fulness of his divine knowledge displayed, but such a brightness of parts and apprehension as spoke an uncommon pregnancy, and left them still free to suppose him no more than man, though for his age a wonderful one. So much the dispensation undertaken by him required, in the whole course whereof nothing was permitted that might justly call the truth of his human nature in question. For this reason the evangelist prudently adds at the close of the chapter, that *he increased in wisdom as well as stature*. Mind and body both received additional improvements, though some of those additions were imparted in larger proportions than usual. The endowments of each exerted themselves in measures and actions suitable to the several stages of his life. And even the divine nature, though always present, seems to have communicated its powers to the human by distinct and gradual illuminations; declining industriously the public manifestation of itself to the world, till, according to the common course of things, ripeness of years and judgment had carried him up to the perfections of a man, and the execution of his ministry called for such evidence to assist him. So little reason have we to suppose that he, who condescended to be like us in body, should think it below him to be so too in that other no less essential, but much more noble part of us, our souls; without which it was impossible for him to be man. So little, to conceive of the divine essence as supplying the place and offices of our intellectual faculties. For all that is divine is infinite, and nothing infinite can admit of enlargement; he therefore that *increased in wisdom* must needs be man, with regard to the seat of wisdom in man, which is a finite reasoning mind.

5. Once more. St. Luko thought it requisite to acquaint us, at the fifty-first verse, that Jesus accompanied his parents back to *their own*

home, that he dwelt with them at Nazareth, and was subject to them. How his time was spent in this retreat we can have no certainty. Whether he wrought with Joseph at the carpenter's trade, as some of the ancients have delivered their opinion, is not material to inquire. Thus much we are satisfied of, and that is enough for our purpose, that, whether his life were a life of labour or not, it was a life of modesty and meekness and exemplary obedience.

And what a pattern hath this set our children, of humility and submission and reverence to their parents! How indispensable does it represent their duty, how inexcusable their stubbornness and contempt, when he, who was God as well as man, thought it became him still to be governed, and in all his deportment was full of respect to them, whose Son though he was in one capacity, yet was he their Father, their Lord, their King, their Creator, in another! Sure no child after this should dare to disregard a father or mother, though their persons be never so despicable or their circumstances never so deplorable. Sure none can suffer himself to despise them for infirmities of body, decays of age, or meanness of condition. None who considers our Saviour as his example can. For what defects of nature, what difference of fortunes can set any one so far beneath any other as these persons were really below the blessed Jesus? God and man! The distance is infinite, and leaves no place for comparisons. How sacred is the obligation which blood and nature have tied, when even the name and character alone is venerable, though the relation be wanting! For such our Lord hath proved it by that observance paid, not to her only of whose substance he was made flesh, but likewise to him who was no otherwise his father than by reputation and common acceptance; entitled to this honour only as the husband of Mary, and by a mistake of the world, who were not let into the mysterious secret of a virgin made a mother.

Most wisely in the meanwhile did the Holy Ghost insert this passage into the history of our meek Redeemer's life, as a singular ornament and grace to it, an early but remarkable instance of his marvellous condescension, and such a motive to profound reverence and humble duty, as for force and impression might exceed ten thousand laboured arguments.

Consider this, all you whom the pride or the giddiness of youth, the heat or the perverseness of your spirits, the sprightliness of your wit, or the success of your industry, hath made refractory or haughty; and consider withal how you will be able to stand before this Judge at the last day. A Judge, who himself learnt obedience in the days of his flesh; who will require a severe account of that duty which he thought it no lessening of himself to pay; a duty, which, by paying, he hath sufficiently declared to be due and necessary from every child to every parent, so far as, by the laws of God and man, they have a right to command it from them.

6. But it must be confessed withal that this dominion, and the deferences rising upon it, though very large, are not without their bounds; beyond which they must not, they cannot, in justice and

reason, be allowed to extend. Some reserved cases, it is plain, there are, for which this very Saviour is also our precedent. After his stay behind at Jerusalem without the leave, or so much as knowledge of his parents; after that kind complaint from his mother, *Son, why hast thou thus dealt with us? Behold, thy father and I have sought thee sorrowing*; he purges himself of that seeming neglect, and thinks no farther apology needful for all the trouble and perplexity this action had put them to, than that intimation at the 49th versc, that he had other affairs upon his hands; that there was one infinitely superior, whose orders were of the last importance, and they must not take it ill if he made it his first care to attend that Father, though with the imputation of some disregard to them; meanwhile they found him where he ought to be, and doing what his character and post required. For thus much is included in that short sentence; and it is but reasonable to suppose all this was meant when he said unto them, *How is it that ye sought me? Wist ye not that I must be about my Father's business?* A saying, which the next versc says *they understood not*, but the following occurrences of his life have abundantly explained it to us. And the argument it contains I have purposely reserved for my last observation, with a design to close this discourse with some useful rules and practical inferences from it.

The sum of what I have to offer by way of inference from hence will all turn upon this, that in the duty of a Christian there are some things required of a subordinate and occasional obligation, and others of a supreme, perpetual, and indispensable one. That every man indeed stands bound, so far as it is possible for him, to make good the expectations of those several characters and capacities in which the providence of God hath placed him. But still this must constantly be done with an eye to that relation which he bears to Almighty God. That this is of the highest importance and strongest engagement; and therefore if it happen, as many times it may, and sometimes will, that these seem to clash and become inconsistent with one another, in such cases a man may, nay he must, nay he ought scarce so much as to deliberate whether he should not set aside every thing that hinders the discharge of religion and a good conscience. These are to be first and uppermost in our consideration and care, and all besides dispense with themselves, and, in the nature and equity of the thing, give place to them. Which is but in other words to say what the apostles did to the chief priests at Jerusalem, that where both cannot be obeyed together, there it is right and reasonable that we should hearken and study to recommend ourselves to God rather than men^r.

The rules arising from this inference would, if the argument were taken in its utmost latitude, extend to the obedience due to the civil magistrate^s. But (in regard a fit occasion will shortly offer for treating of that expressly and at large) I shall at present make it my endeavour to be useful by some directions restrained to private families. The subject now before us is the behaviour of a son to a natural

^r Acts iv. 19; v. 29.^s Epistle for the Fourth Sunday after Epiphany.

parent, the best and meekest son to the best and most excellent mother. To this I shall therefore keep close by framing such advice as concerns the demeanour and mutual regards proper for parents and children, and, in some proportion, of masters and servants toward each other. Advice which all, I think, who diligently attend to it must needs confess manifestly to result from this portion of Scripture and that which hath already been spoken upon it.

1. And first of all; if God ought to be pleased and served in the first place, and the discharge of our duty to him be the thing we are principally accountable for; then are all parents and masters hereby plainly condemned, who refuse to allow the persons under their care all necessary means and reasonable leisure for the exercise of and improvement in the business of religion. How much leisure is reasonable and what means are necessary, it is not possible for me or any other teacher to determine in the general. Because, after all that is or can be said, the different circumstances of each party concerned will continue to be the true measure of them. But thus much I may say with confidence and great safety, that as God hath been wonderfully indulgent to us with respect to the necessities of this life in particular; as he hath made even the works of our lawful calling, when pursued with honest industry and a regular concern, a branch of the Christian's duty, and highly acceptable to him; so we, in gratitude, should imitate this goodness, spare him as much time as fairly we can, and be as liberal in the returns of our service as ever the case will bear. Thus much, to be sure, we are absolutely bound to, not to let even the most busy employment swallow up all our thoughts and pains; not to involve ourselves to such a degree in the affairs of the present as to forget that we have any, that we have our main interest to be secured in the next world.

And as this is an obligation incumbent upon every man for his own particular, so is it no less for theirs of whose behaviour and education he hath the charge. The rather in truth, because the giddiness and inconsideration of youth have need of a powerful restraint from without; and to make the fear and service of God their choice, it is necessary (ordinarily speaking) that they be first fixed in them by the authority of their governors: and therefore it is by no means enough that such be permitted to employ some hours in holy duties, when they are found inclining to it themselves; but for the most part highly requisite that they be often called upon, spurred forward, and obliged to draw nigh to God, even when their own dispositions would not, if let alone, bring them thither. By these means they will be taken off from idleness, weaned to the pleasures and vanities of the world, acquire by degrees a habit of thinking and seriousness, be taught not only to *remember*, but to *love their Creator in the days of their youth*, delight in his goodness and esteem his service, as in reality it is, perfect freedom. These methods I may venture to prescribe as usually necessary; and most parents and masters of families feel occasion, I doubt, more than enough for them. But where we have the happiness to meet with early and forward desires to be holy and good, where our

children and servants even go before our care in the way of godliness, to check these is not only wicked, but perfectly barbarous. Here then it will be prudent to temper such zeal with knowledge, to direct their judgments, by shewing how all the parts of religion agree together, how far God allows the concerns of this mortal life to intermingle with those of eternity, and that he expects a provision for our bodies and families should come in for some share of our time and pains. And when they are brought to a right sense of these matters, then to deny them competent opportunities for praying and reading, and coming to church, and preparing for the blessed sacrament of the Lord's supper, and the like, is a most ungodly betraying of our trust. And as oft as our own very urgent business is not neglected upon these accounts, the words of our Lord here ought to be accepted for a sufficient justification, *How is it that ye sought me? Wist ye not that I must be about my Father's business?*

2. Secondly. I cannot but think it proper upon this occasion to counsel parents, in the next place, that they would be exceeding cautious in disposing of their children, as to the professions and trades that must settle them in the world. The consideration that commonly determines men's choice in this particular is, what calling will be likely to prove most thriving and gainful. But though such views may be allowed their due weight when seconded by others, and not liable to any just objection, yet ought they by no means to be insisted on as the only, no not as the principal considerations. For have we forgotten so utterly what the wisest of men observes, and what experience never fails to confirm, that *'better is a little the righteous hath, than great riches of the ungodly?* Better, as it is enjoyed with more comfort and content, without clamour from abroad, without reproaches from within; as it is likelier to engage the blessing and providence of God, to grow greater, to wear longer. But, all these advantages apart, do we not call ourselves Christians? Would we not by that name be understood to believe a future state and an immortal soul? Should we not then above all things else be solicitous for the eternal welfare of our children? And can it become us to engage them for term of life in such practices as, for a little pomp and plenty here, will render them for ever miserable hereafter? When St. Paul orders servants to *obey in the Lord*, he means that they should observe their masters so far as their directions agree with Christ's. And when he exhorts the brethren all to *abide in their calling with God*, he intends that their temporal interests should be reconcilable with, should indeed be subservient to, their future everlasting one.

The duty we owe our neighbour is in our excellent Catechism said, among many other things, to consist in this, that *we learn and labour truly to get our own living, and to do our duty in that state of life to which it shall please God to call us.* Our living must be got, but got truly, that is, justly and honestly. We must answer the state of life to which God calls us; but God calls no man to a state and trade of

sin. And therefore, when a calling engages any man in acts of sin, or in provoking other people to sin; when it drives him upon methods of falsehood and deceit, of lewdness, or any manner of dissolute conversation; when the profits propounded from it are not to be attained so long as innocency and a clear conscience are preserved; those gains are the wages of iniquity, the price of heaven and our souls; that calling is certainly unlawful, and no advantages, no not *all the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them*, can render it fit for a prudent man to choose. If, as the last particular declared, the most commendable professions and practices may not go away with the whole of us, but a great deal ought to be reserved for the uses of God and a better life; how unreasonable, how unnatural, how barbarous a wickedness must it needs be, to bind our children out to the devil, by putting them into such ways of getting wealth as lead directly to hell; and, that they may *wear purple and fine linen, and fare sumptuously* for a few days, expose them almost to the certainty, the likelihood at least, of crying in vain for many ages for *a drop of water to cool their tongues, when they shall be tormented in that flame!*

Farther yet. I cannot in this case think it sufficient that our children be not trained up in a direct necessity of sinning, but that, as much as in us lies, they be set at a distance from all probable occasions and allurements to it; that we consider the infirmities of human nature, and the frequency and strength of temptations to do evil. Hence it will follow, that such professions as manifestly lay men open to danger, where we have instances of many if not most people miscarrying, where good principles are apt to be unsettled, and hopeful beginners generally harden and turn profligate, that all such, I say, are much too hazardous for them to be trusted with. A good and tender, a wise and religious father will not venture a child in methods of living, not only where he must, but where it is odds he may, and where very few do not, make shipwreck of faith and a good conscience.

In short, we ought to bear in mind continually that *our treasure is laid up in heaven, that our continuing city is not here, but we seek one to come*; that virtue and piety are the only expedient for bringing us to and settling us in that blissful place; that, consequently, every man's grand affair is *so to pass through things temporal that he finally lose not the things eternal*. All our cares therefore, all our prospects, should be governed by that one. All our concerns so ordered, all the fortunes and posts of our children so laid out, that they may not neglect the more valuable advantages of their souls, but so contrive to manage the business of the world as at the same time faithfully to dispatch the business of their Father and our Father, their God and our God.

One word now of advice to children and servants, and all that are in a state of subjection; and then I have done.

Now here I desire all such very soberly to consider, from what hand parents of every sort derive their authority, even from God above. Their obedience then to these in all lawful and honest commands is obedience to God: it is an act of religion, and therefore to be performed, not only with diligence and fidelity, but also with zeal and

cheerfulness. They do their great Father's and Master's business, and purchase to themselves a sure reward in heaven, while their labours deserve the approbation of their superiors upon earth. So very merciful is God in accepting men's lawful industry; so well pleased with their care, in any business they are intrusted with, that he places it to account, as an instance of their faithfulness and duty to himself.

It is true, if their parents or masters impose any terms which they ought not to comply with, they must obey God, whatever be the consequence. But yet even then, when they must disobey or displease their governors, this is to be done upon plain and sure grounds, and always with modesty and meekness and good manners. The reasons of their refusal, their own just vindication, their real concern for all such unhappy occasions, are to be represented in the softest and humblest and most respectful expostulations that can possibly be thought of. Their *liberty* never to be used for *a cloak of maliciousness* and obstinacy, but *as becomes the servants of God*. And because his servants, therefore not in a condition to do any thing which they know the great and common Master of all mankind disallows. I say, which they know he disallows; for in order to preserve their innocence, they should be very industrious to get their judgments informed aright, that they may not be ensnared with frivolous and unnecessary scruples, pretend points of conscience where there is no room for them, and decline that obedience ignorantly, which they ought to pay, and to understand the limits of it better. In order hereunto, they will do well most earnestly to beg the directions and assistance of God's enlightening Spirit; for though all have need enough, yet they who are young, and in circumstances of subjection, unexperienced generally, unlearned too often, these are more especially concerned to come to God in the language of the Collect for this day, begging that *they may both perceive and know what things they ought to do, and also may have grace and power faithfully to fulfil the same, through Jesus Christ our Lord.* Amen.

THE SECOND SUNDAY AFTER THE EPIPHANY.

THE COLLECT.

ALMIGHTY and everlasting God, who dost govern all things in heaven and earth; Mercifully hear the supplications of thy people, and grant us thy apeace all the days of our life; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

THE EPISTLE. Rom. xii. 6.

6 *Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, whether prophecy, let us prophesy according to the proportion of faith;*

7 *Or ministry, let us wait on our ministering: or he that teacheth, on teaching;*

8 *Or he that exhorteth, on exhortation: he that giveth, let him do it with simplicity; he that ruleth, with diligence; he that sheweth mercy, with cheerfulness.*

ing them that have more and are placed above him, or despising them that have less, and are below him, make it his business to discharge his own part diligently and conscientiously, and rest contentedly in that.

9 *Let love be without dissimulation. Abhor that which is evil: cleave to that which is good.*

only, but hearty and sincere. But let virtue and duty be the measure and ground of it. And do not only avoid, but hate and detest all wickedness, and let no consideration ever reconcile you to it: do not only practise but delight and persevere in goodness, and let nothing be able to draw you off from it.

10 *Be kindly affectioned one to another with brotherly love; in honour preferring one another.*

as becomes such: pay all due regards to one another, which either men's virtues or stations require; and let your humility be seen in acknowledging the good qualities of your brethren, and respecting them above your own.

11 *Not slothful in business; fervent in spirit; serving the Lord;*

such as becomes men who are doing God service, and (as times and circumstances will allow) can never do too much for such a Master.

12 *Rejoicing in hope; patient in tribulation; continuing instant in prayer;*

let the hope of a reward keep you cheerful: endure what God sends with contentedness and resolution; and persevere in your requests for his grace and mercy, though you should not obtain what you ask for some time.

13 *Distributing to the necessity of saints; given to hospitality.*

Christians; and be very forward and eager in entertaining strangers, particularly those who are forced to flee their own home for religion.

14 *Bless them which persecute you: bless, and curse not.*

interest malice provoke you to any return of angry imprecations.

6, 7, 8. The consequence of that union and mutual relation I mentioned between the members of one body is plainly this, that every man ought to consider the abilities God hath given him, and the post he hath called him to in the Church; and without envy-

ing them that have more and are placed above him, or despising them that have less, and are below him, make it his business to discharge his own part diligently and conscientiously, and rest contentedly in that.

9. Let your love to every fellow-member be, not in pretence and outward show

only, but hearty and sincere. But let virtue and duty be the measure and ground of it. And do not only avoid, but hate and detest all wickedness, and let no consideration ever reconcile you to it: do not only practise but delight and persevere in goodness, and let nothing be able to draw you off from it.

10. Consider yourselves as brethren, and let your tenderness and good offices be

as becomes such: pay all due regards to one another, which either men's virtues or stations require; and let your humility be seen in acknowledging the good qualities of your brethren, and respecting them above your own.

11. Let your diligence and zeal in your duty be

such as becomes men who are doing God service, and (as times and circumstances will allow) can never do too much for such a Master.

12. When afflictions or persecutions are upon you,

let the hope of a reward keep you cheerful: endure what God sends with contentedness and resolution; and persevere in your requests for his grace and mercy, though you should not obtain what you ask for some time.

13. Extend your charity for the relief of your fellow-

Christians; and be very forward and eager in entertaining strangers, particularly those who are forced to flee their own home for religion.

14. Pray for your persecutors, and let not their bit-

terest malice provoke you to any return of angry imprecations.

15 *Rejoice with them that do rejoice, and weep with them that weep.* 15. Be so affectionately concerned for all Christians, as both to have and show a fellow-feeling and tender resentment of all the good or evil that happens to them, especially that of their souls.

16 *Be of the same mind one toward another. Mind not high things, but con-* 16. Live in perfect amity and concord. And when it is in your power to do good, think no person too mean to do it to, nor any honest method beneath you to do it by.

COMMENT.

THE last day's Epistle declared to us the closeness of that union which Christians ought to look upon themselves knit together by, when called so often *one body in Christ, and every one members one of another*. In the explaining whereof having spent part of my discourse, I closed with some of those obligations which that consideration brings us under, and are contained in the beginning of the chapter. The Scripture now in hand consists of a great many, which for method's sake we may conveniently enough reduce to the following heads. 1. ^b Contentedness in our station. 2. ^c Diligence in our proper business. 3. Mutual love ^d and respect. 4. ^e A tender concern for the prosperous and adverse fortunes of our fellow-Christians. 5. ^f Unity in matters of religion; and, 6, ^g constancy and meekness under persecutions and wrongs. Each of these shall be considered as briefly as I can; remembering that my method, propounded before, does not undertake to treat of any duties we meet with in this chapter according to their own due extent, but purely and so far forth, as they are consequences of that union and mutual relation intended by this figure of a body.

I. I begin with contentedness in our respective stations. The arguments for which are comprised in the 6th, 7th, and 8th verses, and prosecuted more at large in the xiith chapter of the first Epistle to the Corinthians. By comparing these two places, it seems very probable that the gifts more directly aimed at by the Apostle are those extraordinary assistances of the Holy Ghost vouchsafed to Christians in the infancy of the church, as at that time necessary evidences of the truth, and fitted for the more successful propagation of the Gospel. Yet are not those arguments, either in the Apostle's design, or in the nature of the thing, so confined to the extraordinary, as not with great force and clearness of reason to extend to all ages and conditions of Christianity when left to the ordinary methods of grace, by which it now subsists.

For, first, we are put in mind (as was observed before under the head of humility) that all these endowments, by which any one man excels any other man, are gifts. Instances of favour, which none of

them who enjoy could lay any manner of claim to, or by any industry of their own acquire to themselves. Consequently, the meanest in common esteem are the effect of bounty: and all agree in this, that they come all from the same hand, and are so many streams of grace issuing from one common source of undeserved and overflowing mercy. The thing men receive is in substance the same, for though ^b*there be diversities of gifts*, yet *the same Spirit is given in all*; and though there be ⁱ*diversities of operations*, yet is it *the same God which worketh all in all*. A God who is tied to no proportions, who need not give at all except he please, and therefore works freely both in the act and in the measure of his distributions. For ^k*all these worketh that one and the selfsame Spirit, dividing to every man severally as he will*. And the plain inference from hence is, that where every man hath more than his due, there none can have a right to murmur or complain; and where all have the honour of receiving from God, none can in reason think himself disgraced upon the account of any inequality in the degree of what he so receives, since all partake in that one best gift, and are considered by that one best Giver.

2. But, secondly, such inequality is not only not unjust, but it is likewise prudent, and proceeds upon equitable considerations. For ^l*every man* (says this apostle elsewhere) *hath his proper gift of God, one after this manner, and another after that*. An observation made indeed upon an occasion somewhat different from the subject we are now upon, but intimating however this general truth, that that is a man's *proper gift* which he is qualified to use and to improve. And therefore, when it shall be remembered that this is the *gift of God*; one, whose wisdom adjusts all things with the greatest exactness; one, whose providence disposes every man's fortune and post in the world, as well as disposes their several abilities; one, who especially consults the beauty and convenience of the whole, and is not directed by such narrow and partial views as ignorance or interest are apt to sway us by; it seems but reasonable to believe that every man is placed in such a sphere as, all things considered, it is best for that man at that time to be in. And that he who made him and posted him there did so, because he best knew what he was cut out for; that, if the fault be not his own, he may be serviceable in this station, and if he be not, it is highly probable he would prove less so in any other. All which St. Paul, without any overstraining this allusion, seems to insinuate, not only in the 6th, 7th, and 8th verses now in hand, but also in his discourse to the Corinthians, when comparing the different orders and offices in this mystical to the different members and their respective functions in the natural body. So that as the formation of these last is adapted to the uses nature designed them for, the qualifications of the former are likewise in proportion suited to the condition God hath set them in. And this is certainly a very powerful motive to contentedness, that whatever place we hold in the body of Christ, he who set us there knew very well why he did

so; that however we may think ourselves capable of filling a higher, better than those already in it, yet if the experiment were made, it is probable it would be made to loss. So much the more probable, as we are more disposed to think loftily of ourselves and meanly of those above us; as we are forward in usurping, or bitter in detracting from and envying the honours of their post, and dissatisfied with, and given to disdain and to be ashamed of the meanness of our own.

3. Farther yet. This inequality of gifts and stations is not only just, because free,—not only prudent, because accommodated to the parties concerned,—but it is also absolutely necessary. The beauty of the body cannot be displayed, the exigencies of the body cannot be supplied, nay, the very being of the body cannot be preserved, without it. All these require variety: the beauty, as consisting in symmetry of parts; the exigencies, as served by several offices, to be performed by instruments differently disposed; the being, as including in the very idea of a body order and distinction, and without these no longer a composition fitted for life and motion and sense, but a rude mass of useless undigested matter, a lump of inactivity and confusion. So says the apostle of the body natural: *"The body is not one member, but many. If the foot shall say, Because I am not the hand, I am not of the body; is it therefore not of the body? And if the ear shall say, Because I am not the eye, I am not of the body; is it therefore not of the body? If the whole body were an eye, where were the hearing? If the whole were hearing, where were the smelling? But now hath God set the members every one of them in the body, as it hath pleased him. And if they were all one member, where were the body? But now are they many members, yet but one body. The application of all which similitude himself hath made in the latter end of that chapter: "Now ye are the body of Christ, and members in particular. And God hath set some in the church, first apostles, secondarily prophets, thirdly teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, governments, diversities of tongues. Are all apostles? are all prophets? are all teachers? and so on. To the same purpose in his Epistle to the Ephesians: "He gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ. The sum whereof is, that the necessities of mankind thus united are of several kinds: that these cannot be served without a proportionable number of organs formed and placed differently: that the difference of that form and place depends upon the uses assigned to each: that all the parts thus formed and placed make up one regular fabric: that every one of these is useful and necessary in its proper position; the least and lowest can no more be spared than the noblest and highest: that the exalting of one above its due situation and proportion would produce a defect and deformity, no less than the debasing or diminishing of another: that every one is therefore of equal value when considered as a member, and all compounding the same body. Consequently, that this*

difference of gifts and stations ought to breed no discontent, but quite the contrary; because without this difference of parts there could not be the union of a body; and without such union there could not be that mutual relation, that reciprocal necessity and usefulness, that equal value and regard which now there is, from every one to every other Christian, considered as a part of and fellow-member with himself, separated from whom it is impossible for the body to subsist in that capacity.

What then is the result of all this, but that, since all cannot have the same place, nor execute the same office in the church and the world, each should rest satisfied with the disposal of his wise Head, and cheerfully take up with that use he is framed for! that the eye should be content with seeing, and the ear with hearing; the hand with working, and the foot with walking; the unlearned with receiving instruction, and the learned with the labour of giving it; the inferiors with obedience, and the poor with industry; the lawyer with the bar; the divine with his ministry; the tradesman with his shop, and the husbandman with his tillage? For when these go out of their own way, and invade the business proper to each other, the union of the body is broken, and nothing but disorder and mischief can possibly come of it. This pragmatical and envious spirit, this ambition and emulation, is, in truth, the cause of all that confusion which either the church or the state is at any time endangered by. And therefore St. Paul hath wisely joined those two exhortations together, that *we study to be quiet, and to do your own business*. This is what he presses here, that we would consider our own gifts and the characters we are appointed to; that we would keep to and contain ourselves within the bounds these have set us. That we would not take upon us to be wiser than He that made us and posted us in this rank, but as we are elsewhere directed, *As God hath distributed to every man, as the Lord hath called every one, so let him walk, and therein abide with God*. By which *abiding*, only let me add, that it is not the apostle's intent there, neither is it mine here, by pressing the duty of contentedness to represent all change of a man's post unlawful; for this in some cases is advisable and useful, in others absolutely necessary. And therefore, when the providence of God calls us away to another station, obedience to that call is no argument of our former discontent. And this the providence of God may be fairly supposed to do as oft as necessity forces, or authority commands, or manifest advantage to the public persuades, or many lawful and weighty circumstances, fit to balance a discreet and conscientious man, concur to represent such an alteration not only lawful, but highly to be chosen and commended. But where levity and littleness of spirit, ambition or greediness of gain, envy at others, or uneasiness with one's own private condition, are at the bottom of such a change, and the true motives inducing it, there to be sure the man is blamable and the duty of his membership violated and forgotten. For where all cannot have a place high

and honourable, eminent and public, none should scorn those of a lower and laborious degree, but do his business gladly there while in it, as well as gladly embrace ease and promotion when opportunities offer for them. St. Paul hath left us clear enough in this case: *'Art thou called being a servant? care not for it: i. e. let not that trouble thee, perform thy part honestly and contentedly. But if thou mayest be made free, use it rather.* Yet still use it with this temper and remembrance, that though liberty be a more commodious, yet service was as truly a Christian state; and in truth thou shalt be esteemed and rewarded according to thy care of that trust and function in which thy present situation in the body hath engaged thee. And this leads me to the

2. Second duty instanced in diligence in our particular place and calling. This is what the apostle would have us understand by *'walking in*, by *being faithful to*, and, in the Scripture now before us, by *'waiting on* our respective offices, by *not being slothful in business*, but *fercent in spirit, serving the Lord*. This is the inference drawn from every man's having received some proper gift, for, as he argues elsewhere, *'the manifestation of the Spirit is given to every man to profit withal*. This is the design of our blessed Saviour in his *'parable of the talents*, where the reward of each servant is proportioned to his improvements; and he who hid his talent in a napkin is condemned to utter darkness for being *slothful and unprofitable*. This is the plain consequence of our fellow-membership in one body, by referring us to nature, which in so vast a variety of parts hath not formed any one merely for show, but all for use; and all too for such uses as do contribute, not only to their own single benefit, considered abstractedly, and either in opposition to or apart from the rest, but some way or other to the common good of the whole. So that whatever fails in this point is not a part, but an exerescence and a burden; a wen that loads, or a canker that gnaws and eats it away. The effect of which is not beauty or health or strength, but a deformity and a nuisance, a weakness and disease.

Thus also the *'body of Christ*, he tells us, is *increased and edified by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part*. So that no man performs the duty of a Christian who sits with his arms across, and hath nothing to shew for the time and the abilities afforded him. The difference of degrees and fortunes in the world do indeed allow, nay, they require different sorts of employment; but no man's life, in any the most exalted or plentiful condition, was ever intended to be idle and wholly unemployed. To eat and drink and sleep, and purely to amuse and recreate ourselves, are refreshments designed to recruit our spirits and fit us for new business, but are not themselves, nor can they be, the proper business of any man living. And as in our natural composition there never is or can be one moment's entire rest, so in our spiritual and politic one the lying still of any member is at once a mischief to itself and to all

^r 1 Cor. vii. 21.

^s 1 Cor. vii. 17; iv. 2.

^x Matt. xxv.

^t Rom. xii. 7, 11.

^y Ephes. iv. 16.

^u 1 Cor. xii. 7.

about it. And therefore whatever is or may be reasonably expected from us, whatever are the duties which our education and endowments and manner of life have fitted us for or confined us to, the industrious discharge of these is a service done to God, an obedience due to our common Head, a care owing to ourselves and to those that have immediate dependence upon us, an instance not merely of charity, but even of strict justice to our brethren, who, being one with us, have a right to demand, and are defrauded and really injured when they do not actually reap, some advantage from us.

These reflections may suffice, I hope, to make us sensible both that we ought to be employed, and after what manner it becomes us to be so. To say we must not live like drones, upon spoil and prey and sucking out the fruit of other men's sweat and strength, is to say no more than this apostle did when directing the Thessalonians, that *if any would not work neither should he eat*. And I cannot forbear remarking by the by, that St. Paul, when calling such, *disorderly walkers and busybodies*, points at qualities that are certain companions of idleness. For the mind cannot be absolutely out of employment. Vice and dissolute principles tread close upon the heels of sloth; and as from not doing good we quickly slide into doing ill, so from not having some business of our own to entertain us, we naturally fall into that which no way concerns us; to prying, and meddling, and tattling, and censuring, and slandering, and mischief-making. So certain is it that, even in our personal capacity, business is a good refuge, and saves us out of harm's way; so evident, that in our public it is unavoidably necessary, because there is no middle state between helping society and hurting it. And the phlegmatic sluggish parts, which add nothing to the beauty and strength, are no better than the excrement and filth first, and then the sores and scabs of this body.

To say that no man ought to sustain himself by vicious practices, by lewdness or fraud or oppression or discord, or any thing that is of ill fame or pernicious consequence, is no more than civil communities generally agree in. And some states have had the wisdom to provide against these, by calling all persons liable to suspicion strictly to account for the methods by which they and their families were supported.

But the laws of the Christian society say a great deal more. They forbid us to do ill, they forbid us to do nothing, they forbid us to be busy about that which in effect is nothing; to squander away our time in impertinences; to take pains that are not like to turn to any account. They enjoin us to make a just estimate of our gifts; to remember the Author, the dignity, the end of them, and not to trifle away means and opportunities fitted for producing the noblest effects; to behave ourselves worthy our character, as becomes reasonable creatures and enlightened Christians,—characters utterly defaced in those that make any sort of wickedness their business; greatly disparaged by them who stoop so low as to lay themselves out upon mean and

little designs; never answered, except by such callings and such industry about them as may tend to our own benefit and salvation; nor then noither, except our management, and the matters in which it is employed, do in such manner consult our own, as at the same time, and together with it, to advance the public good.

Thus much is apparently included in this allusion of a body, whose every limb and vessel, though ready to discharge the office peculiar to it, yet not one of them does it with any separate view of delight or interest of its own. The eye does not see, nor the ear hear, nor the stomach receive and digest food, nor the hands act, nor the feet travel for themselves; but each consents to minister to the others' occasions, and all together conspire to preserve and promote the welfare and comfort of the whole. And this, I think, sufficiently intimates, not only what unwearied diligence is required in filling our own post, and performing our own part, but that no man is at liberty to choose such a post or part for the employment of his life, from whence it is likely any evil may, from whence it is not probable indeed that a great deal of good will come, and that no private profit of our own is singly a lawful inducement for such a choice. But to justify us in this matter, it is necessary that the methods we live by be blameless and fair and honest; such as we need never be ashamed to own and distinguish ourselves by; such as, in the natural course and tendency of things, may contribute to the increase of our own virtue, the glory of God, and the advantage of our brethren. *For he that in these things serveth Christ, he only is acceptable to God, and approved of men.*

3. The third particular taken notice of, as recommended here, and grounded upon the similitude of a body, is *mutual love and respect*. ^a*Let love be without dissimulation. Be kindly affectioned one toward another in brotherly love.* And again; ^b*In honour preferring one another; be of the same mind one toward another; mind not high things, but condescend to men of low estate.*

In the former of these, our love, the Apostle requires two qualifications, the sincerity and the fervency of it. Both plainly resulting from the consideration of our neighbours making up one whole, and being integral parts with ourselves. Every man naturally bearing such a regard to every part of his own body as admits no hypocrisy, or false appearance of the affection he really hath not. And this distinguishes true Christian charity from all those formal pretences and affected civilities, from all those interested and designing, those counterfeit and treacherous professions of kindness, which the friendships of this world so generally consist of, when in truth there is little or nothing but self at the bottom all the while. It is not therefore in this case enough that we serve and do acts of friendship to others, unless we do them for their sakes that receive them. Nay, it is not enough that we love them with a common and general sort of affection, though this be undissembled, unless this be done with that warmth and fervour which nature inspires for those relations that are

very near and dear to us. For such is every Christian, a child of the same Father, a member of the same body.

The latter, that of respect, is opposite to the contemptuous coldness and disdainful treatment, which the opinion of our own advantages and the defects of our brethren are so frequently the cause of towards the persons who, upon these accounts, seem so far our inferiors as not to be worthy our regard. And this the Apostle, much to the same effect indeed as here, but in terms more expressive of the comparison I am now upon, hath urged in his Epistle to the Corinthians; *'The eye cannot say to the hand, I have no need of thee: nor again the head to the feet, I have no need of you. Nay, much more those members of the body, which seem to be more feeble, are necessary: and those members of the body which we think to be less honourable, upon these we bestow more abundant honour; and our uncomely parts have more abundant comeliness. For our comely parts have no need: but God hath tempered the body together, having given more abundant honour to that part which lacked: that there should be no schism in the body; but that the members should have the same care one for another.'*

This care of God and nature to set every part above our scorn is here propounded as a pattern to model our behaviour upon, and a reason sufficient why no man should be despised. The short of it is, that what those we think most despicable want in one way is made up to them in another; and where the gracefulness falls short, there the convenience and usefulness excels. Thus the most necessary operations of life are performed, partly by vessels hid from common view; partly by such as, when seen, make no beautiful figure; partly by some, which general custom and natural modesty labour to conceal. Just thus the meanest of mankind are of most general, most indispensable use. The leisure of the learned, the luxury of the rich, the glittering pomps of the great, what would become of them all, if the illiterate, the poor, the lowest in degree and common account, should stop their hands? if the plough and the mill and the wheel and the manufacture stood still; if the laborious pains of them who seem out out for nothing above that constant drudgery should cease, nay should but intermit for a very small season? Is not that pride then most unreasonable, that vilifies and tramples upon those faces, to the sweat of which its support, its very subsistence is owing?—that minister to our plenty, and put the very bread into our mouths? It is most extravagant upon a civil consideration; it is much more so upon a religious and spiritual one. For, in this regard too, we have reason to think it a mercy that the poor we have always with us. That their wants make room for our charity, and *'provide us bags that wax not old, a treasure in heaven that faileth not, a safe repository where no thief approacheth, neither moth corrupteth.'* That their mean birth and figure in the world give occasion to that humility which hath the promise of a higher elevation, and conforms us to the image of our Head, who, for our much more despicable sakes, *'humbled and even emptied him-*

self. But, which is more, this seemingly vile wretch is one body with thyself, as nearly related to Christ, as closely compacted into him; and, if in that lowest capacity he executes his office, he may one day be the object of thy envy, whom now, neglecting thine, thou thinkest so far beneath thy value as not to hold him worth thy pity.

This is directly the case as represented by St. Paul. Let us next see the behaviour of the body natural, that from thence we may learn what at least should be the resentments and behaviour of the body mystical. Now he observes, that here we are solicitous to provide what additional ornaments we can, and to make amends for the defects of nature by the supplies of art. A care that nature seems to have inspired as a token of gratitude for the service those parts do us, and a necessary decency in covering and defending what ought not to be exposed, and yet can least be dispensed with; and all agree in esteeming the neglect of this decency and care a symptom of a profligate and abandoned mind. Ought we then in the body of Christ—that head which assigns our respective stations and fortunes—ought we not to treat those whom a few circumstantials have placed a little, but a little, below us, with all possible humanity and respect? Can it become us to insult their infirmities of mind or body, to make their meanness of birth or parts or profession matter of jest and barbarous triumph? No, we should learn from that care, that cost, that pain we are so often content with, to hide any bodily deformity, how much we should make it our business to cherish, to assist their weakness, to shield many of their follies and faults from shame and reproach. We should esteem the assistances given to them a debt, and ourselves obliged by all manner of courteous deportment and kind condescensions to repair and supply those comforts and honours they want, and which, did they not want, we could not enjoy. Thus we should balance one convenience with another, and labour so far to bring all to a level, that not any Christian may have reason to think himself neglected or despised, but all be treated as becomes men who are all needful and helpful, all too needing help, all serviceable, though not in the same kind, and all sensible that they are and ought to be so. This, rightly weighed, would produce that *honour*, that *civil preference*, that *one mind*, that *same care* pressed by the Apostle. For where our occasions and our supplies, our uses and defects are reciprocal, though all ground of distinction be not, yet any mischief that can come from a too rigorous insisting upon it is taken away. And one would think no man need be advised to live friendly and comfortably and respectfully with those, without whom he cannot live at all.

4. The fourth thing here enjoined is, our tender concern for the prosperous and adverse fortunes of our fellow-Christians. *Rejoice with them that rejoice, and weep with them that weep*, ver. 15. And this we likewise find urged from the same topic all along insisted on; *Whether one member suffer, all the members suffer with it; or one member be honoured, all the members rejoice with it*. And again, *Remember them*

that are in bonds, as bound with them; and them which suffer adversity, as being yourselves also in the body. Recollect a little, how impossible it is for any part of us to endure pain or sickness or hunger or cold alone. How quick the communication, how sharp the anguish, how general the disorder, how great the anxiety, how diligent the care to assuage or to relieve any indisposition or smart, of the least and most distant member! And again, upon any return of health and ease, how sudden, how sensible, how mighty is the joy! upon any accession of beauty or ornament, how gay the spirits, how cheerful the countenance, how pleasing the innocent pride of it! And let these instruct us what right, what obligations we have, to take part in the good or ill events of our brethren, to think no man's joys or griefs entirely his own; but to suspect ourselves whether we be really alive in that body, when such a narrow selfishness hath hardened us as shuts out all tender impressions, when cold, benumbed, and quite forsaken of that reciprocal sense which the different fortunes of our fellow-members ought to create. Let these convince us too, that such concern must not content itself with private and inward resentments only, but be expressed by active and vigorous, ready and continual assistances. That as one part of the body submits to be wounded or blistered or scarified, or to nauseatings or griplings, to discharge the humours settled in another, and set the whole at ease; so should we be far from grudging any supportable degree of expense or trouble for the benefit of the distressed and injured; esteeming every member's sufferings a calamity to the body in common. Consequently, that we do not *weep* with the afflicted as we ought, except we dry up their tears, by labouring to redress those afflictions from whence they flow. That we do not *rejoice* with the prosperous as we ought, without ceasing to envy, and desiring to add to their happiness. Our diligence in both kinds must go to the very utmost of our powers. They who have opportunities must *distribute to the necessities of saints, and be given to hospitality*. Nay, they must even court and hunt after such opportunities, seek them with an eager zeal, and think themselves to have obtained a prize worth all their pains when they have the good fortune to find them. They who cannot do thus must at least wish they could, and never want the disposition when they have not the ability. And since our prayers are confined within no bounds, these must stretch themselves all the world over. For in regard Christ hath dispersed his church over the face of the whole earth, the distance of place makes no difference in the degree of relation; they are still members and the same body with ourselves; and we must love and be touched with a sensible regard, must intercede with and give thanks to our common Head for them.

5. Fifthly. In regard this union is divine and spiritual, instituted to promote the glory of God and the benefit of souls, it should be our earnest and constant study to promote, and come up as near as may be to a perfect unity in religion. Now the only way, it is plain,

for uniting souls, is by an agreement and consent of their several faculties. Thus men are united in their understandings, when they believe and acknowledge the same holy truths, and abide by the same principles. In their wills and affections, when they pursue the same ends, express the same desires, and bear the same love to that which is good and to one another. Which, added to the former, makes up what the Apostle calls *keeping the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace*. From these two should follow an uniform behaviour and consent of action, termed by the same Apostle *walking by the same rule, and minding the same thing*. When we jointly advance the same common interests; when, as becomes a body animated by one spirit, we all attend without distraction to the furtherance of piety and peace, to the salvation of souls, to the adorning our profession by undissembled goodness and a wise well-governed zeal; when we, with *one mouth* as well as *one mind glorify God*, and, like strings tuned to the same sound, make that worship harmonious and uniform which is established to express this union, and is so admirably contrived for edification and decency. Well were it, if these engagements were duly laid to heart by those busy factors for the devil, who employ their wits and pens in poisoning the easy and unstable with profane, lewd, or heretical principles; well, if they would remember them too, who, for interest or prejudice or peevishness, break the order, and depart from the communion of a settled church, to whose doctrine they offer none, and to whose discipline they are able to bring so very few, so very poor exceptions. But whether these men will hear or whether they will forbear, still it is our part by all manner of regular means to testify our reverence for Christ, our obedience to our lawful pastors, our cheerful and unanimous conformity to their wholesome laws, and our love to the brethren and fellow-members. Labouring continually and earnestly to obtain that most valuable blessing which we are taught to pray for in our excellent daily prayers, *the good estate, I mean, of the catholick church; that it may be so guided and governed by our Lord's good Spirit, that all who profess and call themselves Christians may be led into the way of truth, and hold the faith in unity of spirit, in the bond of peace, and in righteousness of life*.

There yet remains a sixth duty behind, that of constancy and meekness under persecutions and wrongs, enjoined at the twelfth and fourteenth verses; but by reason of my former enlargements upon the rest, and the affinity of this to some others, which will call for our consideration the next Lord's day, I choose to reserve it till that time.

ⁱ Eph. iv. 3.

^k Phil. iii. 16.

THE SECOND SUNDAY AFTER THE EPIPHANY.

THE GOSPEL. St. John ii. 1.

1 *And the third day there was a marriage in Cana of Galilee; and the mother of Jesus was there:*

feast for a marriage, probably of some of his mother's relations, where she was present.

2 *And both Jesus was called, and his disciples, to the marriage.*

3 *And when they wanted wine, the mother of Jesus saith unto him, They have no wine.*

4 *Jesus saith unto her, Woman, what have I to do with thee? mine hour is not yet come.*

in, and that miracles were not to be wrought for gratifying the requests of friends, but had their proper seasons, of which he was the best judge.

5 *His mother saith unto the servants, Whatsoever he saith unto you, do it.*

an absolute denial, but as an intimation rather that he would reserve himself till it was proper) bade those that attended be sure to observe any orders he should give them.

6 *And there were set there six water-pots of stone, after the manner of the purifying of the Jews, containing two or three firkins apiece.*

serve for the several sorts of washings which the law obliged the Jews frequently to repeat.

7 *Jesus saith unto them, Fill the water-pots with water. And they filled them up to the brim.*

8 *And he saith unto them, Draw out now, and bear unto the governor of the feast. And they bare it.*

9 *When the ruler of the feast had tasted the water that was made wine, and knew not whence it was: (but the servants which drew the water knew;) the governor of the feast called the bridegroom,*

10 *And saith unto him, Every man at the beginning doth set forth good wine; and when men have well drunk, then that which is worse: but thou hast kept the good wine until now.*

1. Three days after Jesus came into those parts, (see chap. i. 43.) there was a

chap. i. 43.) there was a

2. They therefore invited him and those disciples who attended him.

3. Upon their provision of wine falling short, his mother desired him to supply them.

4. Jesus replied, that this was not a matter proper for her authority to interpose

her authority to interpose

5. His mother (who seems not to have taken this for

6. Now there stood six large vessels, the use where-

of was to hold water, that might be always at hand to

the law obliged the Jews

the law obliged the Jews

the law obliged the Jews

10. It is usual, when men's palates are fresh, and best able to distinguish, to give them the best they have; but thou hast, con-

trary to common custom at entertainments, reserved the most generous wine to the last. Hereupon (as the ninth verse intimates) the servants were examined about the matter, and gave an account how they came by it.

11 *This beginning of miracles did Jesus in Cana of Galilee, and manifested forth his glory, and his disciples believed on him.* 11. This was the first instance Jesus gave of his divine power, which had its intended effect, by confirming the faith of those disciples whom the first chapter relates to have lately come to him.

COMMENT.

THE miracle here related being the first that offers, as well in the history of our blessed Saviour's life as in the course of this work, I conceive it may be of some use to premise somewhat concerning miracles in general; which I shall do in the plainest and most instructive manner that I can.

1. Now the first thing I observe on this occasion is, that upon all extraordinary and new discoveries of God's will to mankind recorded in Scripture, it appears to have been his constant usage to strengthen their authority by a power of working miracles, imparted to the persons whom he thought fit to employ as instruments for publishing those discoveries to the world. In proof of this there is no need to labour; the whole historical part of the Old and New Testament bearing such clear and ample testimony to it. For from the very first call of Abraham out of a country overrun with idolatry and blind superstition, down to the latest memorials of St. Paul and the other apostles, the narrative of two thousand years' transactions abounds with instances of this kind so very numerous, that it were an undertaking almost as endless as it is superfluous but barely to repeat them. Let it suffice then to remark upon this occasion, that the end such wondrous operations were designed to serve is not merely the manifestation of God's almighty power, but, generally speaking, the employing that power so as thereby to give evidence to some important truth, to establish the authority of some eminent teacher, to convince them who did not yet believe, or to confirm such as were still weak and wavering. They who will be at the pains to consider and compare the facts and their several circumstances may quickly satisfy themselves that this was their general intent, and will easily discern one or more of these purposes to have been the motives, even where they were not the effects and consequences of them. They ought indeed to have been both; and we may justly think it matter of wonder that they should at any time fail of their intended success, when that hath been considered which I desire may be observed in the

2. Second place. That there are few things wherein mankind seem to be more agreed than in the acknowledgment and acceptance of miracles, as an authentic and indisputable testimony that the persons intrusted with such power were employed by God. This sense of the

thing appears from the confession and practice, not of such only upon whom the acknowledgment of the true God and the prejudices of education might be pretended to have influence, but of heathens and idolaters too. Thus Pharaoh's magicians confess the miracles of Moses and Aaron to be *'the finger of God'*. Thus in the controversy between Elijah and the priests of Baal, it was without any difficulty accepted as a fair proposal, that He who answered by *fire from heaven* should be unanimously served and worshipped; and accordingly, upon that prophet's sacrifice being consumed, the cause was immediately yielded. ^m *For all the people, when they saw it, fell on their faces, and said, The Lord he is the God, the Lord he is the God.* Thus Elisha desires ⁿ Naaman the Syrian might be sent to him, that his miraculous recovery from his leprosy might make him know *there was a God in Israel*. And this effect it had, as appears by his solemn declaration, that *'he would thenceforth offer neither burnt offering nor sacrifice unto other gods, but unto the Lord'*. Thus again Nebuchadnezzar, and after him Darius, was so affected with the wonderful deliverances of the three children and Daniel, as presently to reverse their impious decrees, to put to death the advisers of their punishment, to advance those peculiar favourites of heaven to the highest trusts, and to enjoin the worship of the only true God by a most solemn ordinance to take place throughout their whole dominions. Can we, after all this, think it strange, that in a country so much better informed, so much more accustomed to events of this kind, a learned ruler of the Jews should in these terms accost our blessed Lord: ^p *Rabbi, we know that thou art a teacher come from God: for no man can do these miracles that thou doest, except God be with him?* Or that a mean man who had been born blind should take the confidence to confront a whole assembly of Pharisees with this argument: ^q *Since the world began was it not heard that any man opened the eyes of one that was born blind. If this man were not of God, he could do nothing?* Or that a consult of wicked rulers should assign this as a politic reason for conspiring the death of Jesus: ^r *This man doth many miracles. If we let him thus alone, all men will believe on him?* Or, lastly, that our blessed Saviour himself should put the credit of his doctrine upon this short issue: ^s *If I do not the works of my Father, believe me not. But if I do, though ye believe not me, believe the works: that ye may know, and believe, that the Father is in me, and I in him?*

I forbear sundry other passages to the same effect, presuming that these suffice to make it plain how received a testimony this of miracles was, and what success it hath used to meet with in all ages and parts of the world. The obstinacy of some that have stood out against it proves it indeed to have been not a compulsive or invincible argument, for nothing can be so to reasonable agents. But the sufficiency of it hath been abundantly seen, as upon other occasions, so especially in the entertainment it prepared for the gospel, with all whose minds

^l Exodus viii. 19.

^o Dan. iii. and iv.

^r John xi. 47, 48.

^m 1 Kings xviii. 24-39.

^p John iii. 2.

^s John x. 37, 38.

ⁿ 2 Kings v. 8, 17.

^q John ix. 32, 33.

were not before blocked up by those two ordinarily impregnable barriers—wilful ignorance and worldly interest.

To what we find in Scripture concerning the easy and favourable reception of true miracles, our own reason may add a second argument from the contrivance and forgery of false ones. For every counterfeit supposes something, not only of reality, but of excellence too, which it hopes to gain the opinion of by such artful dissimulation. Thus hypocrisy in religion speaks a confessed goodness in piety and virtue, and a plausible lie the estimate of truth. And as there would be no false jewels or false money if true stones and standard had not both been, and been high in value too; so, had no miracles been ever wrought, or had they not been in the nature of the thing fitted to succeed in the purposes they were wrought for, it could neither have entered into any man's head to pretend to them, nor could such pretences have turned to any account. The frequent impostures of this kind therefore, which some think to take advantage from against miracles in general, seem rather to conclude the quite contrary way. And instead of inferring, because many have been false, there were never any true, it carries a much better face of reason to say, that if there had not been many confessedly true, it can hardly, if at all, be conceived so much as possible that there should ever have been one false, less yet, that any single man should have been deluded by it.

This seems to be the case of miracles, as to the end and the fact: I only add, in the third place, that the nature of these is such as renders them the most proper and convincing evidences that can be of the thing they are meant to prove; a commission, I mean, from Almighty God to the worker of them, and the truth of what he shall declare to us in his name. And in this point, I hope, the three following considerations may be admitted for sufficient satisfaction:

1. First. That by miracles are properly understood such events as exceed the power of nature and ordinary means, and which the agent could never effect by any skill or strength of his own. There are many accidents unusual and strange, many compositions and productions in nature prodigious and monstrous: these happen very seldom, and for that reason surprise us very much when they do. But because the result of some secret powers and the uncommon coincidence of causes make them at least possible to be accounted for that way, they are not, in strict speaking, miraculous, though strange and full of wonder. The ground of which distinction lies in this, that settled rules and natural causes cannot be marks of a presence and power immediately divine. The notions of God and his providence do all confirm that remark of the Psalmist: *‘He commanded, and all things were created: he hath stablished them for ever and ever; he hath given them a law which shall not be broken.’* So that these regular appointments in nature are under the same conditions with all other laws, which cannot be superseded by any authority less than that from whence they derived their sanction at first. When any subject then

receives an operation of which it is not naturally capable, or which though it be capable of, yet this is by such means as are not naturally fitted to produce it, these operations are miraculous. Nor need it here to give us any great trouble, that the wisest of men cannot exactly determine how far the powers of nature may go, since in these matters it is enough that there are many cases to which the plainest man alive may be as sure as he can be of any thing that they cannot possibly go. And therefore, when dead carcasses are restored to life; when diseases, inveterate and incurable, are recovered; when natural defects are supplied by a touch, or a word, or at a distance, and in an instant, without any application or medicine, no doubt can remain whether a principle above nature do not bring these marvellous things to pass. And since men are a part of the creation thus limited and restrained by natural laws and powers, if they shall at any time overrule and transcend these, what can we think but that this is by the extraordinary assistance of the common Creator and Lord, who reserves to himself that incommunicable character of sovereignty by which his stated methods are set aside? This then proves the miracles of our blessed Saviour, the prophets, and apostles, and other holy men, to be the works of God in and by them; that they were instances far out of the reach of human strength or wisdom, and beside, above, or contrary to the established rules of natural causes and ordinary providence.

2. Secondly. The constant apprehensions which both reason and revelation have given us of God forbid us to imagine that he will employ his power to deceive his creatures. Of all the divine perfections none shine brighter or are more amiable in our eyes than truth and goodness. The former cannot attest to a lie, nor the latter seduce men into dangerous and destructive mistakes. To these we are beholden for our certainty in things of common use; and that, though men differ sometimes about the report of their senses in matters of speculation, yet all the world agrees in it so far as is necessary for the support and convenience of human life. And if so good care be taken in cases common and of less importance, much more secure of it may we be where God immediately interposes, and where a right or wrong judgment is sure to prove of the last consequence to us. For what idea can we have of a cruelty more monstrous, more perfidious, than to leave men bewildered and lost in their eternal concerns, men that have proceeded with all possible prudence and caution, that have suspended their belief till a miracle took off the scruple? To suspect, I say, that Almighty God is capable of employing infinite power and distributing the course of nature with a design to mislead and delude such wary and honest and teachable men, is to destroy and subvert his attributes, and leave ourselves no notion at all of such a Being; nay, for him to permit the same evidences to be produced for errors as for truth, is in effect to cancel his own credentials, and make miracles of no significance at all. Thus much may serve to justify men's embracing that doctrine which comes confirmed by miracles, that these are extraordinary demonstrations of God's power; and that God, as being perfectly

true and good, could not set his seal to a forged instrument, nor will he suffer it to be so nicely counterfeited as should lead wary and well-intending men into deceit and damnation. For this were to set truth and error upon the same foot by allowing both to produce the same evidence, the same signatures of his direction and approbation in their own behalf, and consequently to perplex the most important matters, and introduce scepticism and eternal confusion.

3. Thirdly. Miracles have this peculiar advantage, that they come home to the mind presently, and put men upon consideration more powerfully than any other motive whatsoever. The comparing things and the weight of the reasons produced for them together, is a work that all people are not fitted for. And even they who think themselves most so have yet often been imposed upon by false colours and those deceitful arts of arguing, which men of skill make use of to cast a mist before the plainest truths, and to give the greatest falsehoods an air of probability. But at the best this is a work of long and cool thought, an improvement acquired by very slow degrees. A miracle, on the other hand, pierces quite through the soul, strikes all our faculties at once, and, by offering itself to our bodily senses, becomes an argument for the meanest capacities to judge of. It is not lost in idle astonishment and unprofitable gazing, but carries the beholders to a speedy inquiry, and so surprises and instructs together.

Men immediately recollect that this must be the hand of God, from whence it is that we find him styled not only *“He that doeth*, but *He who alone doeth great wonders*; and therefore Christ does most emphatically style these *“the works of his Father*. They know that so wise a Ruler does not use to go out of the common way, nor break in upon his own laws, except upon weighty occasions. They are agreed that the general reason of his doing so is the giving credit to some messenger and message sent by him; and hence the Sareptan widow, upon receiving her son brought to life again by Elijah, presently breaks out into that natural inference, *“Now by this I know that thou art a man of God, and that the word of God in thy mouth is truth*. Hence the multitudes, upon our Lord’s dispossessing an unclean devil, cry out, *“What thing is this? what new doctrine is this? for with authority he commandeth even the unclean spirits, and they do obey him*. Then they feel themselves excited to attention and reverence, and look for other collateral motives of persuasion. But it is the miracle that first turns the scale, and sets the mind at large from infidelity or suspense.

This shews the force of miracles to rouse men out of their unthinking indifference to holy things, and to determine their judgments when they apply themselves to think in good earnest; and it shews the necessity of them to plant new articles of faith, because no man is bound to receive any revelation as God’s from those publishers who are not able to produce his attestation of it. So good reason had the Jews to require miracles of our Lord; so good had he upon all occa-

^u Psalm lxxvii. 14.

^x Psalm cxxxvi. 4.

^y John x. 37.

^z 1 Kings xvii. 24.

^a Mark i. 27.

sions to appeal to them ; so inexcusable was their perverseness when refusing an assent to his doctrine, which he so frequently, so rightfully challenged upon this account.

Let this suffice to be spoken of miracles in general : the usefulness, the end of them, the sense of mankind concerning them, the acceptance and effect they found with impartial and considering people, and their natural tendency to dispose men for consideration and conviction. I now proceed to the particular miracle set before us in the Gospel for this day. Wherein the following circumstances more especially call for our observation :

1. First, the not working it till after some delay.
2. Secondly, the prudent manner of doing it : and,
3. Thirdly, the efficacy of it when done.

1. First. The not working it till after some delay. To take this matter right, it is requisite to observe that the virgin, in some pain, as it should seem, for the trouble her friends would be under for an entertainment too short for their company, acquaints Jesus with their want of wine^b. To this he replies in terms so seemingly rough, that interpreters have been at some trouble about their meaning : *c Woman, what have I to do with thee ? My hour is not yet come.* The complaint implied a desire of help from him in this exigence ; but in cases where a heavenly Father's honour is to be the governing principle, an earthly mother's authority is quite suspended. And though He who made all times could not be under subjection to any, nor restrained in his power at one hour more than another, yet there was an order to be observed which would give a gracefulness and efficacy to all his works. And miracles were not to be wrought at all adventures for gratifying the curiosity of standers-by, or the importunity of friends and relations, but had their proper seasons, of which his own divine wisdom could best judge, and was not to be directed in. This seems the most probable sense of those words. In which, as we must not suspect any thing of disrespect or indecent heat, so neither can we discover a positive denial. For the next thing his mother does, (after receiving that rebuke due for interposing farther than her character could bear her out,) is to order the servants that whatsoever Jesus should say to them they should be careful to do it^d. Here then we have two things to inquire into,—why our Lord deferred this miracle at all, and why, that seeming refusal notwithstanding, he did it afterwards.

1. His deferring it at first was highly prudent, to prevent all suspicion of ostentation and vanity. For though in the following part of his ministry we find him often complying with people's first requests, yet his circumstances then and now were very different. When his fame had been spread abroad through all the regions round about, and every tongue set forth his noble acts, it better became him, as occasions offered, readily to exert his power. But at present he was not known to the world ; his disciples were but few, and fresh comers, and even his most intimate acquaintance had not yet any due appre-

sensions concerning him. Now He, that made the glory of God and the good of souls his aim, was obliged to set out warily, and stop, as much as might be, the mouth of prejudice and cavil. And nothing could go farther toward fixing him a general reputation than modesty. To put himself forward of his own accord, or to yield to a mother's first motions, might look like an eagerness to catch at admiration and applause, to fall in with an intemperate zeal for advancing his own honour, and a shewing what he could do, rather than discerning what was fit to do. And therefore in this the humility and wisdom of the blessed Jesus appeared, that he tempered his goodness with discretion, drew back upon the instance of his dearest relation, and stood upon the reserve for a more convenient opportunity.

2. For answer that request he did afterwards, and that with very good reason too. Some, from the propriety of the Greek expression, have supposed his mother to speak before the wine was out, and when it grew so low that she plainly saw there would not be enough. Now the custom of our Saviour's miracles is to come in to men's succour when human helps are either past and ineffectual, or not to be had. The necessity therefore of that supernatural supply intended them was fit to be felt and manifest, in order to recommend the benefit itself, and to give the manner of their attaining it a power of making the deeper impression upon their minds.

Nor is it unreasonable to imagine that affection and respect, and an inclination to repair the concern of a lately reprov'd mother, might work upon the sweetness of his temper. Less so still, to say that the vindication of his own honour demanded this miracle from him. For when the servants had been charged with obedience to his directions, matters were gone too far to retreat without incurring the reproach of weakness, and disappointing the expectations that had been raised of him. This reason suits very well with that of his declining it before. For having guarded against all imputation of forwardness and vainglory, it was then prudent to justify his power. The failing in which might have proved of as ill consequence as the attempting it sooner without a pressing necessity. In this we can only offer a probable account. The next thing furnishes surer grounds to go upon, I mean

2. The prudent manner of working this miracle, apparent in the care our Lord took so to order all the circumstances of it, that there could remain no doubt concerning the reality of so wonderful a change.

And this appears, first, from the persons chosen to assist in it. For though the same almighty power, which every year turns water into wine by the impregnating warmth of the sun, concocting the juices of the earth, and the sap of the trees that produce it, could have done so by this in a moment of time without any helper; though he could with the same ease have created wine out of nothing, and filled the empty vessels with a word of his mouth; yet was he pleased to use the ministry of others, the servants of the house, and such as could

not be thought in any confederacy with him. These poured the water in with their own hands, these therefore were so many unexceptionable witnesses, that what themselves knew to be common water was quickly after by the same hands drawn out generous wine.

2. The same prudent care appears, secondly, in the vessels singled out for that purpose. Which, the sixth verse tells us, were *six water-pots of stone, after the manner of the purifying of the Jews*. A remark of great weight and significance in this affair. ^fFor the Jews being commanded frequent washings to take off those legal pollutions which there was no avoiding in their daily conversation; and they being nice in these washings, even to a superstition; every man took care to provide himself with large vessels, that he might never want water at home for any the most sudden emergency. Now this being designed for a holy use, it was reckoned a sin and heinous profanation to put any thing but water into those vessels. So that here was no room for suspecting any thing of wine in those pots of stone before.

3. It appeared, thirdly, in ordering those servants to *bear to the governor of the feast*. For such a one it was the custom of those countries to have. A person of sobriety and gravity, whose business it was to see the entertainment managed by his directions, and to keep all, even the guests themselves, within the rules of decency. His judgment and palate therefore is referred to as more accurate and less vitiated. These circumstances all conspired to advance the credit of the miracle; and they are all agreeable with the general method of our Lord, who does not upon these occasions aim at pomp and show, but proof and attestation; and labours not to astonish men, except in order to persuading and convincing them. Thus he did, and thus it became him to do, who honoured not himself, but the Father that sent him; and sought not his own praise, but the good and salvation of those to whom he was sent.

4. Onco more, I observe the excellence of this ^hmiracle, from the quantity and the goodness of the wine. Of the former the sixth verse, of the latter the ninth and tenth, give us a particular account. So that you see, as all other considerations concur to recommend this wonder, the plenty, the perfection of it, and the bounty of the worker, do so likewise. Even of that God whose power is never stinted, at whose disposal all creatures are, and who, with the but ⁱ*opening of his hand, satisfies the desire of every living thing*.

III. The efficacy of this miracle comes in the last place to be considered. Of which St. John says, that in ^k*this beginning of miracles Jesus manifested forth his glory, and his disciples believed on him*. The importance whereof may probably be best understood by taking notice of a particular signification put by the Jews upon the word *glory*. Whereby they intended the visible marks of God's special presence with and residence among them, in the tabernacle first, and afterwards the temple. Hence their ark is called *the ark of the testimony, the*

^f Chrys. in Joh. Hom. 22; Janson Conc. Ev. cap. 18; Chemist. Harm. cap. 22; Matth. Host. de Hydr. Critic. Sabr. tom. 9. 2 Ver. 8. ^h See Matth. Host. de Hydr. Capacit. tom. 9.

ⁱ Psal. cxiv. 16.

^k Ver. 11.

dwelling or *tabernacle* of God. And when that ark fell into the enemy's hand, the name of a child designed to intimate so sad a calamity is *I-chabod*, *The glory is not*: because, says the text, *'the ark of God was taken*. Hence David, begging to be restored to the place of public worship, the temple at Jerusalem, expresses that happiness by *"seeing God's glory*; and St. Paul says, that *"over the tables of the covenant were the cherubims of glory shadowing the mercy-seat*.

But the same Apostle calls all those things a *figure* and a *shadow* of Christ. Whose incarnation St. John is therefore thought to describe with a peculiar elegance, when saying, that the *"Word was made flesh*, and *set up his tabernacle* among us, resided in our nature and made a human body his veil; in correspondence and allusion to that veil in the temple which separated the visible tokens of God's presence from common sight. Then he goes on, *and we beheld his glory*, a divine presence, not like that under the law, of rigour and figurative importance, but such as brought grace instead of severity, and truth instead of shadows. The word *glory* then, applied to Christ, denotes the same God to have exhibited himself to us in this person who formerly exhibited himself to the Jews in their temple. And by *manifesting forth his glory*, we are to understand that Christ did something which plainly proved his power to be divine, and argued the actual presence of God with and in his human body.

And who indeed less than God could have the creatures of this lower world so absolutely at his disposal, as to make them start from their fixed laws of being, and change their natures and qualities in an instant? He only could repeal these laws who made them. He only could alter their forms who at first appointed them. And when this was done, without invoking the aid of any higher power, it was an evidence of no higher power to have recourse to. It shewed the authority by which he did it to be supreme, as well as the creatures such authority was exercised upon to be entirely his own.

I only add a few practical reflections, and will be brief in each of them.

1. The first our Church hath drawn for me in one of her excellent offices; it is the honour due to a married state. Had this been unbecoming the purity of his most sanctified disciples, would our most holy Master, think you, have graced such a solemnity with his own presence? Would that pattern, that fountain of all purity, have chosen a polluted ordinance for the occasion of his first miracle?

Nay, which is more, would the Holy Ghost have represented the union between him and his church by that union between man and wife? I urge not here the conjecture, because but a conjecture, that this feast was for the marriage of that very *disciple whom Jesus loved*: but I ought not to forbear, and will leave you to apply, that character given by St. Paul, who, without limitation to persons of any quality, declares that *forbidding to marry* is one mark of *seducing spirits and doctrines of devils*.

¹ 1 Sam. iv. 21.

^m Psalm lxxiii. 2.

ⁿ Hebr. ix. 4.

^o Ἐκλήρωσεν ἐν ἡμῖν, Jobn i. 14.

^p 2 Tim. iv.

Secondly. Let me, after the example of many who have treated of this passage, exhort all who enter into that state to imitate these persons of Cana in Galilee by inviting Jesus to the marriage. My meaning I cannot better express than in the words of the same office, that we ought not to undertake so considerable an alteration of our circumstances *unadvisedly, lightly or wantonly, to satisfy the carnal appetite; but reverently, discreetly, advisedly, soberly, and in the fear of God.* Which I take to be of that consequence to the happiness of mankind, that scarce any thing can be more. And certainly nobody ought to wonder at the coldness, the indifference, nay, it were well if I could stop there, but I must say too, the variance and divisions, the scandalous separations, and the yet more scandalous cohabitations of the nearest relations; by which so many families are undone in their fortunes, dishonoured in their blood, tainted with diseases, corrupted in their education, ruined by domestic patterns of vice; those, I say, are consequences which no wise man can think strange, where so many matches are made in which the true ends of them are never consulted: where wisdom and virtue and religion and agreeableness of humour and modesty of behaviour are wholly overlooked, and the beauty and fortune are the only inducements. This indeed may be to call Mammon or Venus, but it is perfectly to shut out Christ and his disciples from the marriage.

Thirdly. I hope it will not, because I know it ought not, be thought unbecoming my profession to say, that this passage shews how little ground there is for that stiff and precise temper which condemns all outward expressions of mirth by public and solemn entertainments. Our Lord's example hath justified such meetings of friends in more instances besides this; and indeed his life throughout is a pattern of social virtues. And, provided the mirth be innocent, the conversation inoffensive, the enjoyment of God's good creatures moderate, I think no considering man can deny but that they are capable of serving many good purposes; and it is plain too that they do not bring us under any necessity of sin. So that if any spiritual inconvenience follow, the blame is not due to the things, but to the abuse of them. And that is no more than every thing else is liable to as well as these.

Lastly. Let us intreat our merciful Saviour that he would repeat this miracle over again in every one of our hearts: that he would take compassion on our frailties, which render us dead and insipid, weak and unstable as water; and that he would endue us with a generous and a strong, even with his own heavenly spirit. That we may get above that flatness and coldness too common in holy duties, and serve him with sprightliness and vigour. He, who answered at last the request of his mother, will most graciously suffer himself to be vanquished by our importunities. And oh, that we, by the help of his grace, may be able to draw out such good wine as the great governor of the feast will condescend to accept; even of that feast where he himself is the bridegroom, the marriage supper of the Lamb.

Fit and prepare us all, dearest Redeemer, to sit down with thee at thy table in thy kingdom, and then consummate thy nuptials and our happiness. Yea come, Lord Jesus, come quickly. Amen.

THE THIRD SUNDAY AFTER THE EPIPHANY.

THE COLLECT.

ALMIGHTY and everlasting God, mercifully look upon our infirmities, and in all our dangers and necessities stretch forth thy right hand to help and defend us; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

THE EPISTLE. Rom. xii. 16.

16 *Be not wise in your own conceits.* 16. Let not a vain opinion of your own wisdom blow you up into disdain of others, or dispose you to use them ill.

17 *Recompense to no man evil for evil. Provide things honest in the sight of all men.* 17. Nay, if others use you so, do not return it in the same kind. In the meanwhile, do nothing unbecoming your character, nothing that may offend or give anybody an occasion of using you so.

18 *If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men.* 18. Live in love and peace with every body. And if some be so unreasonable, that after all you can do they will not live so with you, be sure that the ground of this division do not begin on your part; and when begun, use all your endeavours to heal up the breach again.

19 *Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord.* 19. But I beg of you, by all the tender affection I bear you, take not the matter into your own hands by private revenge, but leave that to God, and wait his leisure to do you right; for you know the Scripture says this belongs to him, and you must not usurp what he hath reserved to himself.

20 *Therefore if thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink: for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head.* 20. But repay wrongs with kindness, and relieve the necessities of them that hate you; for this will either melt down your enemy into repentance for his faults, or add to his punishment, if after such meekness and charity he still remain obdurate.

21 *Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good.* 21. Never give any man that advantage over you, that his doing a base or unjust thing should prevail with you to do the

like. But maintain your virtue, and get the glory of softening and vanquishing his ill by your good nature.

COMMENT.

After those duties which we are obliged to perform toward our common Head as mystical members of Christ's body; after those which more immediately concern ourselves, with regard to the station and office appointed us to hold in that body; after those to which our brethren have a right, who seem sensible of the near relation between us, and desirous to discharge their part; the Apostle now proceeds to direct our behaviour toward such as either are not of that body, or carry themselves to us as if they were not. So that the whole of what remains to be said upon this chapter may not unfitly be reduced to that general topic of virtue, mentioned only in my last, but referred to this discourse for the consideration due to it. That, I mean, of meekness and constancy under persecutions and wrongs. In which the Scripture before us gives me a fair occasion to observe, first, the methods proper for preventing such injuries, and secondly, the deportment which becomes Christians when they have the unhappiness of suffering under them.

I begin with explaining the methods proper for preventing our falling under such injuries and trials.

1. The first of these is a moderate opinion of ourselves and our abilities, expressed by *not being wise in our own conceits*. Wisdom is a perfection peculiar to reasonable creatures, which though all men are far from declaring their persuasion of by a becoming diligence for attaining it, yet every man thus far declares it, as upon no occasion to think his honour more sensibly wounded than by reproaches for the want of it. And as no fancied excellence is apt to blow us up so much as those which raise the opinion of our own understanding, so it may be truly said, that no one quality disposes us either to do or to resent any wrongs comparably to that of entertaining lofty conceits of our sufficiency. For all anger proceeds upon a notion of contempt, and the sting of provocation lies in the thought of our being treated not only unjustly, but unworthily; that we are slighted and undervalued, and looked upon as little and of no consideration, by them who take the liberty of using us ill. This reflection chiefly pushes us on to revenge, that we may make them, to their cost, know what we are, and how much we can do to vindicate ourselves and annoy them. From hence it follows, that men's resentments will naturally hold proportion with that esteem they have of themselves, and suppose they deserve from others. Hence Solomon calls it *proud wrath*, and the person that *dealeth in it* *proud and haughty scorner*. Daily experience proving, that the better and greater themselves and the less other people are in their eyes, the more jealous of affronts, the more peevish and perverse, the more contentious and fierce men generally

are, more disposed to pick quarrels where there is no occasion, and more implacable and averse to reconciliation where there hath been any real occasion given. And if this be so, as we plainly find and feel it is, then it must needs follow too, that the more favourable thoughts we entertain of our brethren, and the less partial we are to ourselves, the nearer to a level we come; and so shall be less apt either to provoke or to be transported beyond due bounds when we shall at any time happen to be provoked by injuries and indignities. And to this level no consideration can be better fitted to reduce us than that so very often urged already, of our being, high and low, rich and poor, wise or ignorant, still all *one body together in Christ, and every one members one of another.*

2. The next expedient offered for this purpose is, to *provide things honest in the sight of all men.* By which we are to look upon ourselves obliged, not only to all those duties which the laws of God or man have bound upon us, but to all that prudence and decency in our conduct that may secure to us the character of discretion as well as of virtue. For there are infinite occurrences in a man's life wherein all that is *lawful* may be far from *edifying* or being *expedient*: many liberties nowhere forbidden, which yet are better not taken: many actions nowhere expressly commanded, which yet are very fit to be done. And again, when we do these, or abstain from those, the very manner and circumstances of the thing may prove of great moment, either for adorning and recommending, or for tarnishing the lustre, and taking off from the beauty and acceptableness of such restraints or actions. This opens a spacious field for the exercise of our wisdom and caution, and the end it hath principally in view is reputation and general esteem. The seeking whereof by all fair means is a respect due to our brethren; who ought to be satisfied that we pay a just deference to their judgment, and are exceedingly desirous to stand well with them. And it is certainly a doing great right to ourselves, by gaining credit and authority; which, as it enables us to be more successful in doing good, so will it prove one of the best guards against suffering evil. It is so, by cutting off occasion from them that would be glad to find it; and by drawing down a general censure and detestation of our enemies, by providing us with favourers and friends, and by hindering others from countenancing and abetting the unreasonable attempts of them who use us ill, even where no occasion can be found for their doing so.

This is the true ground of those exhortations so frequent in these Epistles, that the converts to the faith would be careful to *walk in wisdom toward them that are without*; to *have their conversation honest among the Gentiles*; to *give none offence, neither to the Jews, nor to the Gentiles, nor to the church of God*; to *adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour in all things*: and a great many more to the same purpose. Inculcated for this plain reason more immediately, that the mouths of gainsayers might be stopped, the hands of their adversaries tied up,

^c Ver. 17.

^d 1 Cor. 10. 23.

^e Col. iv. 5.

^f 1 Pet. ii. 12.

^g 1 Cor. x. 32.

^h Tit. ii. 9.

and the inoffensiveness as well as innocency of their lives be their security against the malice and cruelty of those persecuting ages. For though many wicked people do really act against all sense and reason, yet none are so abandoned and lost to shame as not to desire to have it thought they do otherwise. And therefore it is observable, that the primitive persecutions were constantly introduced by calumnies; with an intent, that ill impressions upon people's minds might prepare the way and reconcile them to the barbarities they were about to see inflicted. And accordingly, the champions of this religion were always more solicitous to guard against the slanders than the swords of persecutors. As knowing very well, that to wipe away these effectually was the most ready and effectual course of sheathing, or at least of blunting the edge of the other.

And surely the reflection upon our union in Christ is, or ought to be, a very prevailing motive to that care and circumspection which hath so direct an influence upon the safety of the body and the honour of the head; a care, which advances the credit of that religion whereby we are thus knit together, strikes gainsayers dumb, and is so necessary to preserve even *our good from being evil spoken of*.

3. The third thing here enjoined, as a probable method for prevention of outrage and injuries, we have at the 18th verse; *If it be possible, as much as in you lieth, live peaceably with all men*. St. Peter indeed asks that question, *Who is he that will harm you, if ye be followers of that which is good?* And he had reason; for none, but such as are monstrously brutish, will. But yet, since such monsters there are to be found in the world, too many of those whom our Apostle elsewhere mentions under the character of *unreasonable wicked men*, the cautious manner of expressing this duty was no more than needful. For peace with all the world, though a most desirable blessing, may yet be bought too dear: and therefore we are not left free to seek it upon any terms not consistent with the rest of our duty. When steadfastness to the faith we ought to profess, when zeal for the truth and glory of God, when constancy and courage in virtue are made grounds of a difference; and nothing less than our foregoing these will be accepted for an accommodation of it; in such like cases peace becomes impossible. All we have left to do then is to convince the world that we are not the aggressors: that we neither began the quarrel, nor have a desire to continue it: that, whatever can be reconciled with our higher obligations we are ready to do; willing to depart from our own right, though we cannot give up God's; always disposed to be reconciled, and to forgive the wrongs for which we never gave any cause or provocation. This is *as much as in us lieth*, and this they who decline are no longer true subjects of the Prince of peace, no disciples of that Master, who at his death bequeathed peace to us, as the most valuable legacy he could leave; no living members of that Head, who vouchsafed to become our peace-offering; no longer actual parts of one another, when they rend the body, disquiet and devour

their fellow members; in short, when they do not endeavour to procure and preserve, as they are taught to pray for, *peace always by all means*. And thus I am almost insensibly brought within the compass of my second head, wherein I proposed to consider

11. The deportment becoming Christians, when they shall at any time happen to suffer under persecutions and wrongs of any kind.

The first rule for which purpose I shall offer from those words, *"Recompense to no man evil for evil"*. The words indeed, if taken in their utmost extent, will include the whole said here upon this occasion. But I choose to treat of them as a rule distinct from the rest, because finding some of the best interpreters applying them to a lower degree of meekness and charity than some that follow after, and confining them to a sense that denotes not so much the doing evil, as the forbearing to do good after the example of another. If any one (say they) hath been wanting to you in offices of kindness, which you have very well deserved, and had all the reason in the world to expect from him, let not that refusal or neglect in him provoke you to the like refusal and omission; but be sure to do your part, even to them who have not done theirs to you. Be the reasonableness of thus understanding the words before us as it will, yet to be sure the rule itself is reasonable, and a very necessary one to have men put in mind of. For how many may we meet with every day, who disclaim all thoughts of malice and revenge, and say they would not for the world do their enemies the least hurt, while at the same time they hold themselves privileged, and abundantly dispensed with, from doing them any sort of good! whereas, in truth, whatever it be of kindness or respect, or any manner of courtesy that others may justly claim, upon the account of neighbourhood or relation, or their condition and quality in the world, or any obligation not directly founded upon gratitude, or particular friendship, or intimate acquaintance, or the like; the denying this upon any offence or omission of theirs, I apprehend to be a breach of Christian charity and of the rule before us. The reason is, because such omissions or offence can dissolve no obligations besides those that result from the doing what was omitted, or not doing what offended; but it cannot, in the reason of the thing, have influence upon those that belong to men in other capacities, and would have done so, whether any familiar intercourse or acts of friendship had passed between us or not. And this may possibly be one reason for the place these words have in the chapter; such continuance of our kindness and regards to them, who have disappointed our expectations of theirs, being what the wise and the good cannot but value us, and the principle we are moved to do it by, very greatly for. So that the connection here is justifiable enough, when after *recompensing to no man evil for evil*, we are immediately called upon to *provide things honest in the sight of all men*.

2. The second rule is that of *"not avenging ourselves, but rather giving place unto wrath"*. By which is meant, that we should by no means

take the cause into our own hands, and pretend to right ourselves by repaying injuries and affronts with the same or greater. For which indeed it were an easy matter to produce several reasons unanswerable, would we but submit to consider them as becomes men and Christians: resentment and passion and partiality, and all that fantastical notion of false honour apart, which suggest the direct contrary to this command, and would almost persuade men that they even do well to be angry and take revenge, and have recourse to violence and the private sword. But I may the better content myself with these few before us, because to men of Christian principles they will suffice; and to them who are not so, none ever will. In the mean while, for the setting those in a more convenient and distinct view, I shall first observe how high the duty is carried, and then the arguments made use of to enforce it.

3. The next pitch therefore of virtue in this point I must carry you back for to the 14th verse, *Bless them which persecute you, bless and curse not*: which are in signification the same with those words of our blessed Lord himself, *Pray for them that despitefully use you, and persecute you*. Supposing, then, that even the hottest of our passions should not flame out so fierce as to devour all our humanity, nor make us satisfied with being the executioners of vengeance in our own persons, yet is not this enough. Not to revenge or punish may prove our good nature; but somewhat more is necessary to prove our Christianity. We must not so much as wish that calamity to come from any other hand which we decline inflicting with our own. We must not imprecate upon an enemy the wrath of God for the gratifying a private resentment; we must not take any pleasure in the judgments that befall him without our wishing: nay, we must wish well to and intercede with God for him. And, to put the sincerity of such wishes past a doubt, we must ourselves contribute our assistance toward his comfort under and relief from any distresses that shall overtake him.

4. For that is the last rule at the 20th verse: *If thine enemy hunger, feed him: if he thirst, give him drink*. The partaking of the same nature and the same passions, being liable to the same wants, and feeling the same uneasinesses from them, induce an engagement of a date with our very being; one that begun with it, and cannot be dissolved but with it too. Since, then, our enemy, though an ill or a perverse man, is still a man, no act of his which does not make him cease to be so, can make that obligation cease that is founded in his being such. And therefore this duty, as rare as the practice of it is, hath yet its groundwork laid in natural equity; and we never fail in the performance of it without violence done to that self-evident rule of *doing to others whatsoever we would they should do to us*. Nay, by proportion we are bound to succour him in any imminent danger or extremity, as well as in those of hunger and thirst specified here. To succour him, I say, where our assistance may be of service, to keep him from perishing, and even, with violence done to our own most angry and

most just resentments, to let him see that it is not possible to deserve so ill at our hands, that the heavy hand of God upon his person or his fortunes should be matter of triumph or barbarous joy to us. I only add, in confirmation of what was even now said, that the passage I am upon is not the Apostle's originally, but cited by him out of the Old Testament^p, and consequently a branch of that moral law to which the Jews were able to discern the fitness of complying. The greater still must the reproach needs be upon those Christians that shall stand out against it; whose religion is intended and excellently fitted to soften their hearts and enlarge their bowels, and in all instances of humanity and goodness, of compassion and mercy, far to exceed the righteousness of those that went before them.

St. Paul was very sensible with what difficulty these commands were like to be received, which had a passion to encounter as importunate and vehement as any that human nature hath put into our breasts; and therefore he takes care, not only to introduce and sweeten them with that affectionate compellation, *‘Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, &c.,* but likewise to back and strengthen them with very powerful arguments, the force whereof is the last thing to be considered upon this occasion:

The first of these relates to Almighty God, the second to our enemies, the last to ourselves. To each I shall speak something very briefly.

That more immediately concerning Almighty God we have in those words, *‘It is written, Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord.* Here we are put in mind that God is the judge and governor of the world; that none of the wrongs done to us escape his observation; that he hath reserved to himself the prerogative of calling to account, and making the injurious smart for them; that he will not be wanting in this part of his justice and power; that he hath appointed methods proper for the exercise of both those attributes; and that, for us to go out of those methods by taking the matter into our own hands, and carving out to ourselves such satisfactions as rage and angry resentments suggest, is to usurp upon him, and presume to do that which no private man upon earth hath commission to do.

Now the methods provided by God for this end are, either the interposition of laws and governors, or else the dispensations of his own providence, by which the fortunes and events of men are all ordered and disposed. From the former we are allowed to seek for convenient redress, where the case is of weight to bear us out, where the consequence affects the public good and safety, where the impunity of the offender would render his wickedness insolent and insupportable. Where any of these is the case, we are permitted, and upon some of these accounts we are even obliged, to see that men's injustice be chastised and made an example of, for the restraint of their own sins, and for the prevention of the like in others. But here we must be very careful that the principle we go upon be right; that

the end we propose from such proceedings be our own fit and necessary reparation, not the gratification of our fretted spleen; that our desire of such punishment be determined to the amendment of the transgressor, the common security, the honour of justice, and preservation of order; not to the detriment or shame, the vexation or mischief of the sufferer, but only so far forth as they may contribute to these purposes.

The latter, that of God's immediate providence, is a remedy for us to depend upon, where the ordinary ones of human laws and punishments have either made no provision, or such as cannot conveniently be had. But this dependence must be limited by the conditions just now mentioned. It must not be such as takes actual satisfaction in contemplating and promising to ourselves the judgments of God, or the miseries of our brethren, considered abstractedly as such. Rather indeed this argument should centre in a confidence of our own safety and certain protection from above; nothing being a more substantial comfort to them who endure wrongfully, than that their being content so to do, and to wait his time and good pleasure, rather than to seek for relief irregularly, is a committing of their cause to God, a making it from thenceforth his cause; and that the doing such meek and patient sufferers reason is an act of justice done to himself.

The second argument brought here against revenge, and even for acts of kindness to our enemy when his calamities have reduced him to the need of them, is contained in those words, *For in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire upon his head.*

A phrase of doubtful import, and capable of two significations, both supported by great authorities, both very apposite to the design of the place. The one, that by our courtesy and charity we are much more likely to reduce them that hate and have dealt ill by us to a sense of their fault, and by our kindness melt them down effectually into deep remorse, sincere repentance, and suitable returns for so generous a compassion. There being, it is to be hoped, but few instances of tempers so inflexibly obstinate and perverse, as not to be won by gentleness unmoved and pity undeserved; as not to feel and improve upon the reproaches of a behaviour so unlike their own, when preserved by those very persons whose harm and destruction themselves had wished and laboured. Whereas, repaying affront with affront, and force with force, serves only to inflame men's minds the more, to sharpen the contention and perpetuate the quarrel. And thus some understand, by *giving place unto wrath*, the withdrawing out of the way, and leaving our enemy to be angry alone; forbearing to heap new occasions of heightening the difference, and so constraining his passion to cool and go out for want of fresh fuel to keep the fire in. But when to that quietness and composure of spirit we add the nobler and more heroic virtues of love and mercy; when we seasonably relieve the extremities and afflictions which, measuring others by himself, he had reason to expect we should have insulted over and rejoiced in, this, like the fire used by some artificers in preparing of metals, cannot fail to make the hardest heart give and relent. And thus our meekness and charity

recommend themselves for the very same considerations that run men upon fury and revenge. The design common to both is, to get the better of your enemy; the difference between them this, that violence is not only sinful, but generally unsuccessful, but sweetness and humanity are both innocent, nay, highly virtuous; and also so well fitted for this end, that, in the nature of the thing, one can scarce conceive it more than barely possible that it should ever be disappointed.

But in regard this text is brought hither from the Old Testament, and therefore most reasonably interpreted by the idioms in common use there; and in regard *coals of fire* are generally made use of to denote some very severe effects of God's wrath upon the person on whom they fall; therefore many have supposed that to be the proper importance of this place also; and the *wrath to be given place* to that of God, to whom we should reserve the punishment of them that injure us. And thus St. Chrysostom particularly, though seeming chiefly to favour the former construction, does yet incline to think this might be an artful condescension to men's infirmities. So making the Apostle in effect to say, Better it were that you should utterly lay all thoughts and desires of revenge aside; but since that is a perfection of virtue not to be expected from all, know that even those desires are more likely to be satisfied this way than the other. For the less you meddle in your own quarrel, the more God will assert your right. And if your kindness does not bring an enemy over, his crime is the more inexcusable, and his punishment will be aggravated in proportion. So that, did angry men consider at all, they would forbear avenging themselves, as the proper course of exposing their enemy to a sharper and more mighty Revenger than it is possible for them or any other creature to be.

But can it then consist with the design of the Apostle, or with the temper of Christianity, to do acts of charity with a spiteful intent, and under the mask of kindness to work the greatest mischief? Were not the cruelty of letting an enemy starve in his extremity more desirable to him, more fair and ingenuous in itself, than such a treacherous relief? And can it become them who are commanded to love those that hate them, to contrive, or so much as to comfort themselves with the prospect of, their more certain ruin? By no means, most assuredly. We must lament and pray and strive against this consequence. We must not delight in, we must not, without horror and serious concern, think upon that indignation which our bitterest adversaries treasure up to themselves by their hardness and impenitent heart. Their eternal sufferings cannot, upon any terms, be matter of just satisfaction, nor their temporal, in any other respect than that of tending to their humiliation and effectual reformation, to the change of their minds and methods, and preventing their blacker guilt and sorer punishment hereafter. And with these limitations it is that we are to understand the judgments of God called down upon their enemies by David and other holy men: with these, I say, where they

speak of their own particular case, and not with a spirit of prophecy, where they speak of themselves and their adversaries, in a far different capacity, as types of Christ and his persecutors. In a word, we must do all we can by forbearance, longsuffering, and gentleness, to reclaim and reconcile them; but if they still continue so implacable that their prosperity and our safety can no longer stand together, we then are permitted to wish and endeavour and to bless God for those sufferings which their perverseness hath rendered the only means for our security and preservation. And thus the *giving place* to our great Defender's wrath may become a duty truly meek and Christian. Thus the *coals of fire* (of which their rancour is the proper cause, our charity, our patience but the accidental occasion of *heaping upon their heads*) may be a very innocent subject of consolation and joy to us.

3. The third motive urged here against retaliation of injuries hath a more direct reference to ourselves, and is included in those last words of the chapter, *Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good*. When men contend in mutual affronts and ill turns to one another, the thing each aims at is to come off conqueror at last; but in such cases both are disappointed, because in truth both are subdued. For there is one point which every man is strictly obliged to be jealous of; and while this is maintained his honour cannot suffer. For what is honour, truly understood, but a greatness of mind which scorns to descend to an ill and a base thing? So long then as our virtue continues unblemished, and conscience cannot reproach us, we are always superior in the combat. But when reason and religion give ground, and passion gets the upper hand of these, our impotence betrays itself, and we are beaten from the post which it was our duty upon no terms to give up. It is not the voice of the Christian only, but of all philosophy in general, that true nobleness of spirit is better seen in despising than in returning injuries; in a constant tranquillity of temper, than in rage and resentment. And the modern men of honour, with their false notion, would by the best and wisest of the ancients have been exploded and disdained as the weakest, most despicable, and poor-spirited of wretches. So much more necessary a consideration it is, what may be fit for us to do, than what may be just for others to suffer. So much indeed a greater vexation it is to any enemy to rob him of the pleasure of disturbing us, to shew how much we slight and are above his impotent malice, than to give ourselves and him the trouble of paying him never so home in his own kind. So much more likely to put an end to his fruitless attempts of making us uneasy, which is the sense of overcoming evil with good. Since no man loves to run his head against a wall, or be always labouring in vain. But especially so much more to our own security and advantage, who are sure to continue impregnable while we retain our temper and our virtue; while we keep the reins of passion in our own hand, and insure to ourselves an Almighty Protector, not only to take our part at present, but, which is better still, to reward and crown us for striving lawfully even when suffering wrongfully.

And shall I need to say now that all these duties follow naturally

upon our union into one body in Christ? Where is the tenderness, the mutual amity, the care and pity due to those parts whose weakness hinders the discharge of their respective offices, between men who call themselves members, but contradict that profession by spiting and grieving and tearing and devouring one another? Where the correspondence with, where the obedience to that Head, who hath commanded us to love our enemies, who was continually doing good to his enemies, and so far from being taken off by those provocations they did, by all that their most enraged malice could give him, that at last he willingly died for his enemies; who now stands at the right hand of God interceding for his enemies; whose merciful providence sustains his enemies, and who is ready to receive and embrace and save his enemies to the uttermost; who courts them and offers reconciliation, notwithstanding the great, the daily, the numberless offences repeated boldly, presumptuously, maliciously against him? This is our pattern, which if we do not follow, neither will he be to any saving purposes our Head; this is his Spirit, which they who have not are not of his body; and they who are not of that body here do hope in vain to be reckoned of it hereafter. Of such importance is it that we lay this relation to heart very attentively, and give all diligence to answer the several engagements it brings us into. To which end that my discourses upon this subject may in some measure conduce, I shut the whole up with a prayer, taught us by our excellent church, very pertinent to the matter we have in hand:

Almighty and everlasting God, by whose Spirit the whole body of the church is governed and sanctified; Receive our supplications and prayers, which we offer before thee for all estates of men in thy holy church, that every member of the same, in his vocation and ministry, may truly and godly serve thee; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

THE THIRD SUNDAY AFTER THE EPIPHANY.

THE GOSPEL. St. Matth. viii. 1.

1 *When he was come down from the mountain, great multitudes followed him.* 1. "At his descent from the mount, (called Christ's Mount,) whither he retired with his apostles, and where he had just preached his divine sermon, as he was going to a neighbouring city, (Capernaum probably,) a leper met him in the field adjoining to the city, (where we are told there was an infirmary for persons thus diseased,) it not being lawful for them to be within the cities.

2 *And, behold, there came a leper and worshipped him, saying, Lord, if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean.* 2. This man, in most humble and reverent manner kneeling and falling down on his face, besought Jesus to cleanse him.

† Second Collect for Good Friday.

‡ Luke vi; Mark iii; Luke v. 12; Luke vii. 1; Adricom. Tr. Neph. 62, 69.

3 *And Jesus put forth his hand, and touched him, saying, I will; be thou clean. And immediately his leprosy was cleansed.*

(ordinances,) and no sooner had he said the word but the leprosy was quite gone.

4 *And Jesus saith unto him, See thou tell no man; but go thy way, shew thyself to the priest, and offer the gift that Moses commanded, for a testimony unto them.*

of that nature. Which undergoing the sacrifice, would testify the perfection of the cure, the power of Jesus to heal, and the deference he paid to the law yet in force^x.

5 *And when Jesus was entered into Capernaum, there came unto him a centurion, beseeching him,*

6 *And saying, Lord, my servant lieth at home sick of the palsy, grievously tormented.*

compare Matt. ii. 3, Luke vii. 20, Matt. the mediation of friends, entreat Jesus to heal a servant, whom he valued very much, now sick of a palsy.

7 *And Jesus saith unto him, I will come and heal him.*

(whose piety and charity were eminent,) request; and was now actually moving toward the centurion's house^y.

8 *The centurion answered and said, Lord, I am not worthy that thou shouldst come under my roof: but speak the word only, and my servant shall be healed.*

9 *For I am a man under authority, having soldiers under me: and I say to this man, Go, and he goeth; and to another, Come, and he cometh; and to my servant, Do this, and he doeth it.*

of his friends; nor did he conceive his presence to be needful; for if his orders, who was but a subaltern officer, are punctually observed even in his absence, much more (he was abundantly satisfied) would any command be effectual in this matter which Jesus should please to issue out, to whom he believed none superior in power, and that all nature was absolutely at his disposal.

10 *When Jesus heard it, he marvelled, and said to them that followed, Verily I say unto you, I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel.*

11 *And I say unto you, That many shall come from the east and west, and*

3. Which accordingly he did, and condescended to touch him, (being, as a prophet, above the ceremonial

touch him, (being, as a prophet, above the ceremonial

4. This cure Jesus charged him not to divulge, at least till he had fulfilled what the law ordered in common cures till he had fulfilled what the law ordered in common cures

5. As Jesus was come into Capernaum, a centurion, (who by an usual figure of speech is said to do that himself which others do in his behalf and by his order,

xx. 20, Mark x. 35,) did, by to heal a servant, whom he

7. Jesus, having heard a good character of the man, readily condescended to this request; and was now actually moving toward the centurion's house^y.

8, 9. Hereupon a second message was sent, declaring that he thought himself in no degree worthy the honour

of seeing Jesus in his house, nor indeed of approaching his person with this request,

upon which account he had interposed the good offices

of seeing Jesus in his house, nor indeed of approaching his person with this request,

upon which account he had interposed the good offices

of seeing Jesus in his house, nor indeed of approaching his person with this request,

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^x Levit. xiv; Mark i. 44; Luke v. 14.

^y Luke vii. 4, 5, 6.

^z Luke vii. 6, 7.

shall sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven.

12 *But the children of the kingdom shall be cast out into outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.*

great numbers of them, by their obedience to the gospel, would attain to and inherit the spiritual blessings and promises made to the holy patriarchs. While their own natural issue, the Jews, who were at present the only visible church of God, should be most miserable through their own perverseness.

13 *And Jesus said unto the centurion, Go thy way; and as thou hast believed, so be it done unto thee. And his servant was healed in the selfsame hour.*

of it. Which saying took place so speedily, that the persons sent from the centurion did, at their return back to his house, find the servant perfectly well, whom but just before they had left in so desperate a condition.

only so, but from hence he took occasion also to foretell how many of the Gentiles would hereafter follow this noble example: that

13. After which Jesus declared that the effect of this man's faith should be as conspicuous as the virtue

COMMENT.

THE gospel for this day presents to our observation two cures wrought by our blessed Saviour. Both speedy, both miraculous, both upon distempers past the common help of medicine, both vouchsafed to persons recommended to his favour by very extraordinary qualifications, of a steadfast faith in and profound reverence for him. The subjects are too copious to be treated of distinctly, and therefore I shall satisfy myself with insisting on the former. In which we shall do well to consider,

I. The nature of the disease.

II. The manner of the patient's address for a cure.

III. The success he found from this address.

But in regard great part of bodily infirmities carry some analogy to the miseries of our souls, and our blessed Saviour's cures of the one are excellently contrived for the benefit and improvement of the other; I design, in the contemplation of the mercy before us, to look on the leper in my text as an emblem of ourselves; and as I go along, to shew what our disease is, how we should imitate him in seeking, and by what means we do obtain, a recovery of our spiritual leprosy.

I. First then. Concerning the disease itself, these following circumstances are remarkable. That a leprosy is said to proceed from a general corruption of the blood and juices, to render the person tainted with it extremely loathsome and deformed, to be (in those countries especially) of all distempers the most spreading in the body, and most contagious to others. These are qualities inseparable from the nature of the disease, but if looked upon with regard to the notions of the Jews and their law about it, thus it was, of all others, the most scandalous and the most detestable. It separated the sick

from all civil as well as religious communion, distinguished him by all the outward significations of sorrow and shame, was generally looked on as a plague inflicted by God for some enormous crime, (of which Scripture furnishes several examples,) thought so far above the power^a of art, that the very attempt to cure it by medicine was esteemed an impious presumption. It was dreaded as the highest of all legal pollutions, and required great variety of lustrations before the patient could be restored to the privileges of a Jew. Washings of his body and clothes, sprinklings of blood, burnt and meat and sin offerings. Accordingly, the deliverance from it is generally expressed in terms that import not so properly recovery as purification. Thus the leper here says not, Lord, thou canst make me whole, but, thou canst make me *clean*; and, upon granting his petition, it is not said his leprosy was healed, but that it was *cleansed*. Of this cleanness the priests were to make declaration: in order whereunto several marks were appointed for the direction of their judgment; one of which is so very remarkable, that I shall consider it particularly by and by. Meanwhile let it suffice to say, that a large account of this whole matter is contained in the ordinances concerning it at the thirteenth and fourteenth chapters of Leviticus.

Now, what leprosy was then to the body, the same, in proportion and at all times, is heinous and wilful sin to the soul: it results from depraved humours, a tainted will and inflamed passions; it is noisome and odious in the sight of God and man; expressed for this reason by *wounds and bruises and putrifying sores*. It is rife and catching, swelling from less to greater, and, by a fatal fruitfulness, multiplying from one to many; wasting the conscience, eating away the sound part, and shedding its venom upon as many as come within the reach of its infection. Insomuch that the subtlest poison, the most pestilential vapour, does not insinuate itself more speedily, more mortally than this. Hence every man is warned to keep his distance, and not tempt a danger by too free and familiar approaches; not only to refuse his *consent when sinners entice him*, but not to stand in their way, not to sit in the seat of the scornful, not *to keep company with vain persons, nor have any fellowship with the deceitful*. To consider, as the Apostle says, *that every word of theirs eats like a canker, loosens our principles, dissipates our good intentions, enters and emboldens us in vice; that pitch may as well be touched without defiling, and fire taken into a garment without burning, as men of evil example be frequented and delighted in without contracting soil and damage from them*. So applicable is that of Solomon to every one of profligate conversation: *“Their house is the way to hell, and leads down to the chambers of death. Let not then your heart decline to their ways, and go not astray in their paths. For many strong men have been slain by this means, and whoso cometh near them shall not be innocent.*

^a Num. xii. 2; 2 Kings v. 1; 2 Chron. xxvi. 1; Ader de Morb. Evang. cap. 1; Critic. Sac. t. 9; Mult. xi. 5; P. Menach. on Levit. xiii. ^b Ver. 2. ^c Ver. 3. ^d Isa. i. 5.
^e Prov. i. 10; Psalm i. 1. ^f Psalm xxvi. 4. ^g 2 Tim. ii. 17. ^h Eccles. xiii. 1.
ⁱ Prov. vi. 27. ^k Prov. vii. 25, 26, 27.

So near is the resemblance between the leprosy of the outward and that of the inner man, with regard to its nature and its consequences. Each a noisome, a mortal, and a contagious disease. Some likeness there is too between the Christian and the Jewish laws; though ours by no means answer in the rigour of the execution. We are commanded to ¹*mark bad men, and those that cause divisions and offences, and to avoid them*; to ²*withdraw ourselves from every disorderly walker*: with ³*a fornicator, or covetous, or an idolater, or a railer, or a drunkard, or an extortioner, no not to eat*: ⁴*they that sin are to be rebuked before all, that others also may fear*; and, if milder methods are thrown away upon them, to be excluded the society and privileges of Christians. Which, from the miraculous scourges attending the church's censures in those early days, is called *delivering such over to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus*.

If these ordinances be not observed in their due extent of severity, we owe the misfortune to our own licentiousness, and the general corruptions of the age to which providence hath reserved us. For wholesome rules and strict administrations ask proper seasons and circumstances to render them practicable. And men are never more mistaken than when they imagine that even the best governors can always do all that they think fit to be done in order to a thorough reformation. But then, the consequence of this unhappiness in reason ought to be, not the taking courage in evil doing from such unhappy remissness or disability. But the less care the public is qualified to take of us, the more should every one take of himself; lament those wants of necessary restraint which are not in his power; and stop the growing danger by his own private act, which nothing from without can render ineffectual.

The parallel holds farther yet in the cure of this disease. For as that other leprosy was reputed a stroke of divine vengeance, not to be healed by human applications; so this of the soul is an effect of God's wrath, when provoked to withdraw his grace; and in just punishment to men's obstinacy suffering them to fall from one wickedness to another. Nor is the recovery to be had from any other hand. The most refined contrivances of reason and schemes of morality, and all the crafty inventions of mercenary or superstitious men, are broken reeds; they may serve perhaps to skin over the wound a little with the ignorant and credulous, but the conscience in the mean while is rather deluded than quieted. Here must be a real cleansing too, a sprinkling with blood and a sin-offering, that is, in the true and spiritual sense of the law, repentance and reformation, and the sacrifice of Christ applied to the distempered party. The priest can declare men clean when they are so; but neither his word, nor all he can do, will make them accepted for clean when they are not so. It is the *blood of Jesus Christ which cleanseth us from all sin*; and this remedy is left to be applied upon certain conditions. But they who hope to

¹ Rom. xvi. 17.² 2 Thess. iii. 6.³ 1 Cor. v. 11.⁴ 1 Tim. v. 20.⁵ 1 Cor. v. 5.⁶ 1 John i. 7.

obtain it otherwise, purchase to themselves only a dream of safety and the paradise of fools.

I do not forget myself to be still accountable for one circumstance hinted at before in the Jewish law of leprosy. It is, that the person whose sore came out at once and covered his whole body is pronounced clean^r; whereas others, in whom the plague discovered itself about one or a few parts of the body, are sentenced as unclean. They who have undertaken to explain this law assign two reasons for that ordinance. ^sEither, that such an universal scab argues the venom to have spent itself, without detriment to the strength and soundness of the patient; or, ^tthat this spreading proves no great malignity ever to have been in such a disease at all. For, as rivers when penned up in a narrow course are deep and strong, and eat away their banks to force a channel which they did not find, but when enlarged, they glide away in shallow streams; so this disease, say they, when rank and fierce, enters deep, gnaws away the kindly flesh, seizes the vitals, and penetrates the very bones and marrow; but when of a more favourable and gentle kind, it diffuses and loses itself, is rather a scurf than a formed leprosy, and, though somewhat defacing, yet escapes the censure and shame of the law.

Now this account to me appears not unfitly to figure the condition of mankind, in relation to sins of infirmity and sins of presumption.

The former we are full of, and the frailty of human nature exposes us to frequent commissions of them. The latter, though but few, though but one, yet, if of a grievous kind, does yet contribute more to the sickness and danger of the soul, to the hardening of the conscience, to the scandalizing our brethren, to the reproach of our religion, than the daily, hourly failings, in point of strict duty, consequent upon the weakness of corrupt nature. These do not destroy the peace of our minds, they are pitiable and excusable, incident to good people; and, provided we lament and pray and strive the best we can against them, they do not cut us off from Christ. But the other give deep and deadly wounds, because they argue a mind violently bent, and a profligate sense in the person indulging them. In one case, the *righteous falls seven times a day*, and yet rises again; but in the other, the *deliberately wicked falls into mischief*. The reason is, because the former is surprised, and would stand better if he could; but the latter might stand, and will not. He sees the precipice and knows the danger, and casts himself down headlong, and will not be withheld from his own destruction. So that, though both have their spots, yet the one is *the spot of children*, and the other of *lepers*. Concerning which having already spoken so largely, I think it time to proceed to my

II. Second head. Under which I proposed to consider the manner of this leper's address to Christ for a cure, and, in agreement to and pursuance of that pattern, how it will become us to apply for the forgiveness of our sins.

^r Lev. xiii. 12, 13.

^s Ainsworth.

^t Munster. Clarius. Grotius.

Now in the descriptions given of this matter we find, first, manifest tokens of the man's concern for his present misery, and earnest desires to be released from it; expressed by *coming to meet Jesus*, and *baselying him*, Mark i. 40, Luke v. 12. Secondly, great reverence, in that he is said here to have *worshipped* him; and, in the parallel places, to have done that in a manner the most obsequious and lowly; for they tell us he did it by *knéeing down*: nay, and not content with that, he added prostration too; for St. Luke relates that he *fell on his face* before him. We may discover, thirdly, a firm and undoubted persuasion of Christ's ability to grant his request; consequently, that he thought his power divine, and that too a power of which he had the free exercise and disposal. This assurance is declared in terms the most significant that can be. He says not, If thou wilt pray to God on my behalf he will hear thee and cleanse me; but, *Lord, if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean*. The difficulty that appeared to him was not whether Christ had so great a power as this came to, but whether he would condescend to exert it upon his account: and therefore, in great humility, which is the fourth qualification remarkable in this address, he recommends the matter to his consideration; as being satisfied that he was master of his own favours, and best knew when to grant and when to refuse. *Lord, if thou wilt, thou canst make us clean*. Thus not pressing his petition with an indecent and clamorous importunity, but referring himself entirely to his wisdom and goodness to determine what should become of it and him.

In proportion to the several parts of this example it is necessary,

1. First, that forgiveness should be a blessing of our own seeking, and that it be sought in a very affectionate and importunate manner too. We are not to imagine God will thrust this favour upon us; he hath already shewed himself gracious and condescending even to astonishment, in ordaining such methods for our redemption; in *providing himself a Lamb*, the Son of his love, *who takes away the sin of the world by the sacrifice of his own blood*. He hath brought salvation home to our doors, published a Gospel of reconciliation and peace, used all inducements and endearments possible for a rational creature to be acted upon by, to reclaim, to woo, to win us, to gain our acceptance of our own happiness. And all the part left us is to be prevailed upon to accept. But then we must accept as becomes such a gift, with great thankfulness and godly zeal. The condition is, *Ask, and ye shall have*; and pray remember, this is a condition propounded not only to creatures, but criminals. Criminals, convict not only by the laws which interest as well as duty bound them to obey, but by the sad reproaches of their own guilty consciences.

If this then be the case of you and me and every man breathing, let us turn our eyes upon the wretched malefactors on whom verdict and sentence are passing, and see what nature and love of life prompt them to do. Look upon their tears, listen to their piercing cries and groans, observe their bended knees and wringing hands, their doleful accents and obtestations; and let us learn from these at once to beg, and how to beg, a pardon. Imitate at least their sorrows and their

supplications; be not sullen and impenetrable, but remember thou hast a Judge armed with thunder to deal with. Consider, thy offences are more and greater, the sentence due to thee more dreadful, the punishment more insupportable, the chain of thy sins, wherewith thou art tied and bound, a heavier load than any irons of an earthly malefactor. Let not then nature outdo reason and grace. Let not a short perishing life excite stronger passions than a future and eternal one. Let not the pains of a moment and the scandal of a gibbet be deprecated with more moving concern than the torments of hell and *everlasting shame and contempt*. A deliverance from these deserves all thy application; if these be not averted, thou art undone for ever; they hang over thy head, and cannot be averted but by prayer, by coming with this leper and worshipping and beseeching. *O kiss the Son* therefore, *lest he be angry, and so ye perish from the right way*: ye have already *kindled his wrath*, O serve and approach him *with reverence*. Which is the

2. Second qualification taken notice of in this address to our blessed Lord, and expressed by this person's "*worshipping, kneeling down, and falling on his face* before Christ. Now these are bodily actions, meant for so many significations of a mind full of respect. And in truth, such outward testimonies of zeal are so far from needing to be proved lawful, that they in a manner prove themselves necessary. For it is so natural with the body to conform itself to the present posture of the soul, when the impressions there are at all vigorous and lively, that every part does, as it were mechanically, conspire to speak the resentments within. The tongue by speech, the countenance by its air and form, and every limb by gestures suited to its capacity and the present occasion. So that they who cry down or are manifestly void of such outward signs of devotion, stand in need of all our charity to believe that their spirits are so sensibly, so powerfully affected within as they would have us think them. We can discern the same impressions of joy and grief, and love and fear, in common cases, upon them, as upon ourselves or other people. Why should they then remain to all appearance unmoved and stupid in occasions of infinitely higher concern to them? Why should not grace, and the so much boasted spirit, provoke the same demonstrations of an inward affection that nature plainly does? This, sure, is very hard to conceive, and harder yet it is to say, why those bodies which share in the redemption should not come in for a share of the devotions that seek it. Away, my brethren, away with such senseless irreverence! How can you expect God will grant a blessing for which you shew no manner of solicitude? Would you behave yourselves so unconcernedly before an earthly judge? If therefore no marks of respect or passion would be esteemed too much for such a tribunal, do, I beseech you, as our admirable liturgy exhorts you every day to do, and as the leper here sets you a pattern, **O come and worship, and fall down, and kneel before the Lord your Maker*.

* Matt. viii. 2; Mark i. 40; Luke vi. 12.

* Psalm xiv. 6.

3. As little question can there be made, thirdly, whether we be not obliged to copy after this example, in a firm assurance of Christ's ability to heal us, and saying from the heart, *Lord, thou canst make me clean*. Which, so far as relates to the matter now in hand, is relying entirely upon his meritorious sufferings; acknowledging that he hath made ample satisfaction to the Divine justice on our behalf; and believing the efficacy of his sacrifice to as many as shall put themselves under the conditions appointed for being purged and absolved by it. For this trust is the proper foundation of all our prayers. He that confesses himself a sinner does in that very act proclaim his misery, disavow all desert, all that can incline God to love or favour him for his own sake. He stands condemned out of his own mouth, as one to whom the extremity of vengeance is justly due; and declares that if salvation be attained, this must be owing to some other hand. And since God hath given *no other name in heaven or earth by which man must be saved, but only the name of our Lord Jesus Christ*; he who reposes not his confidence in him alone can have no reasonable encouragement to ask or expect remission of sins.

4. But in regard we have been taught by the first elements of our religion, that the *sacraments are ordained by Christ himself, as means generally necessary to salvation*; and that one necessary predisposition to the worthy partaking of these sacraments is a *lively faith in God's mercy through Christ*; there may perhaps seem some ground for questioning whether we ought, whether it be allowed us indeed, to imitate this leper's petition in the last thing observed, or express ourselves in terms so full of doubt and diffidence, as, *Lord, if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean*. My meaning is, whether the faith in God's mercy required from us do not imply a full assurance, not only that he can, but that he most certainly will hear and forgive and cleanse us.

Now, for our satisfaction in this point, we need only examine what is the proper and genuine importance of that expression in the case before us. This leper must, in reason, be supposed to have formed his persuasion of Christ's ability to help him by the sight or the fame of some former miraculous cures. But the same miracles were instances of mercy too, and must have created an opinion of his goodness as well as of his power. I say they must have done so: because we know, from constant experience and the nature of the thing, that either of these qualities, single and apart, is not an adequate encouragement for our requests. If we be fully satisfied of a friend's good wishes and kind intentions, but sensible withal that though fain he would, yet he cannot give us the assistances we want; we spare ourselves and him the trouble of an application. If, on the other hand, we know the power of an enemy or a stranger to relieve us; we either ask it not at all, or not till, by employing proper instruments, we have prepared the way to his affection, and disposed him to employ that power in our interests. The preferring of every petition

then proves, that we hope and think that neither ability nor inclination to grant is wanting in the party addressed to. And if the leper spoke in a sort of desponding strain, this does not argue that he distrusted Christ's beneficence in general, (which had he done he had not asked at all,) but that he feared his own unworthiness to partake of that beneficence in particular. And so these words express, not the weakness of his faith, but the greatness of his humility.

In like manner are we too enjoined to believe God's mercy through Christ, that he will *spare those who confess their faults, and restore them that are penitent*; for without this persuasion we should be destitute of any ground, any rational motive to pray or to repent at all. But we may, notwithstanding, very justly doubt whether we confess our faults as we should do, at the same time that we rest perfectly assured God will not fail to spare us if we do so. And the belief that we shall be restored upon sincere and effectual repentance does not, by any means, infer a certainty that our repentance is effectual and sincere. The first is a general truth, built upon plain and uncontrollable revelation, upon solemn, repeated, and inviolable promises; and to disbelieve this, is to dispute the justice and fidelity of God, who cannot lie. But whether that general truth be applicable to our particular case, whether we be such manner of persons as have a title to those promises; this second is a new and very distant inquiry from the former. This depends upon a thousand circumstances relating to the present state of our souls, to the constant tenor of our lives; and the doubting of this is only to doubt and fear our own selves, who may be, and it is but too plain are, creatures exceeding frail and fickle and fallible. To say all in one word. To question whether God will forgive sinners, is to question whether he will be as good as his word, though we perform the condition required; and this is a sin, a dishonourable reflection upon him, and a fundamental error in religion. But to question whether he will forgive you or me, or any other determinate sinner, is only to question whether you or I or that person have performed the condition, and be duly qualified for forgiveness according to the terms upon which it is promised. And this, sure, is a doubt that many times may be very just, very useful, and very commendable.

For who is there indeed among us all, the most circumspect, the most devout, the best disposed of Christians though he be, without occasion for such a check from within, such an opinion of his own unworthiness? Which of us can look back, I do not say upon his faults, (those are a black and ghastly sight indeed,) but even upon his acts of devotion and penitence and turning to God, without a secret shame and sensible regret? How many sad relapses into sin, how many feeble resolutions, how many broken sacramental vows does even this best and most comfortable prospect of our lives presently alarm us with! And how are we secure that those of this or any other day shall be more firm and more successful than the past? And if so, how can we forbid them, who so oft have been deceived in themselves, still to go on in fearing and suspecting themselves? In truth, how can we

answer it, should we forbear exhorting and conjuring them so to do—that such a holy jealousy may awaken their care, that the remembrance of their former failings may render them more watchful over their own treacherous hearts, more prudent in the midst of snares and temptations, more strictly conscientious to strengthen, to recollect, to charge themselves home with their promises of better obedience for the time to come; especially, that a becoming diffidence in their own very poor performances may effectually conduce to their humiliation, and clip the wings of that security and spiritual pride, which, of all other vices, most obstructs our improvement in virtue and our acceptance with God? For the humble are his delight; and these will never think their piety disparaged by praying in the modest words and meaning of this bashful leper: *Lord, if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean.*

III. And those that pray with the same disposition he not only *can*, but *will make clean*. For my third and last head consists of the success this petitioner found, and the methods of his recovery in those words, *Jesus put forth his hand, and touched him, saying, I will, be thou clean. And immediately his leprosy was cleansed.* From whence I only beg you to observe the readiness of our dear Redeemer to shew mercy, the efficacy of such fervent prayers to procure it, the suddenness and the perfection of the cure. And as easy, as powerful, as speedy will our spiritual recoveries be, provided we prepare our hearts, and be equally fitted for that mercy, which only waits a disposition in us proper to receive it. Once more; I cannot but take notice of our blessed Lord's marvellous and most amazing condescension, who, though able to have healed with speaking the word only, yet disdained not to touch the poor polluted wretch. Even so, scorn not our polluted hearts, O meek and gracious Saviour, but touch them in much mercy and power, though deformed with the leprosy of sin, and defiled with long and manifold uncleanness. Put forth not thy hand only, but the renewing graces of thy Holy Spirit. Oh enter into us, dwell with us, and reign in and over us, that we may also live and reign with Thee for ever! And since, till that blessed time come, we must be content to continue liable to many weaknesses and great temptations, hear, we beseech thee, the petition proper to this day, that thou wouldest deal with us as with this happy leper, by *mercifully looking upon our infirmities, and, in all our dangers and necessities, stretching forth thy right hand to help and defend us, O Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.*

THE FOURTH SUNDAY AFTER THE EPIPHANY.

THE COLLECT.

"O God, who knowest us to be set in the midst of so many and great dangers, that by reason of the frailty of our nature we cannot always stand upright; Grant to us such strength and protection, as may support us in all dangers, and carry us through all temptations; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

THE EPISTLE. Rom. xiii. 1.

1 Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God.

2 Whosoever therefore resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God: and they that resist shall receive to themselves damnation.

2. Whosoever therefore resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God: and they that resist shall receive to themselves damnation. contrary, teaches him to acknowledge their authority to be derived from God; and consequently, whoever shall resist this power resists God, the author and appointer of it; and must expect severely to be punished for such impiety, if not by course of law and the governor so disobeyed, by some method which God will find for the revenging such an affront to his own ordinance.

3 For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to the evil. Wilt thou then not be afraid of the power? do that which is good, and thou shalt have praise of the same:

3. For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to the evil. Wilt thou then not be afraid of the power? do that which is good, and thou shalt have praise of the same: orderly and well have no ill to dread, but to expect, from the institution and exercise of it.

4 For he is the minister of God to thee for good. But if thou do that which is evil, be afraid; for he beareth not the sword in vain: for he is the minister of God, a revenger to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil.

4. For he is the minister of God to thee for good. But if thou do that which is evil, be afraid; for he beareth not the sword in vain: for he is the minister of God, a revenger to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil. by breach of duty, provokest him to use that power which God, who hath put life and death into his hands, gave him for the necessary correction and exemplary punishment of wicked and disorderly people.

5 Wherefore ye must needs be subject,

1, 2. Let every Christian, of what rank or profession soever, know that nothing in the Gospel exempts him from obedience to the supreme magistrate, and to those that are in authority under him^b; but quite contrary, teaches him to acknowledge their authority to be derived from God; and consequently, whoever shall resist this power resists God, the author and appointer of it; and must expect severely to be punished for such impiety, if not by course of law and the governor so disobeyed, by some method which God will find for the revenging such an affront to his own ordinance.

3. For the design of all government is to restrain vice, and to encourage and support virtue, so that men who behave themselves orderly and well have no ill to dread, but to expect, from the institution and exercise of it.

4. For the magistrate is appointed by God for thy security and defence; so that if thou suffer any harm by him, this is (generally) thy own fault; when thou, by breach of duty, provokest him to use that power which God, who hath put life and death into his hands, gave him for the necessary correction and exemplary punishment of wicked and disorderly people.

5. This proves men under

^a Matt. viii. 24, 25; Psalm xciv. 17, 18.

^b 1 Pet. ii. 13.

not only for wrath, but also for conscience sake. an engagement to submission, not purely from a principle of self-preservation, to escape the civil sword, but to avoid sin and guilt, in obedience to that God whose commission he hath, and in gratitude for the benefits that such a constitution procures to them.

6 *For for this cause pay ye tribute also: for they are God's ministers, attending continually upon this very thing.* 6. This is the ground of governors and their dignity being supported at the public expence. And a very reasonable one it is, since they are the officers of God, who hath a right to all we have, and make the protection and ease of their subjects who pay it the whole care and business of their lives.

7 *Render therefore to all their dues: tribute to whom tribute is due; custom to whom custom; fear to whom fear; honour to whom honour.* 7. And therefore let it be your care too to pay them justly all those aids and impositions, all that subjection and reverence, which the laws of God or man hath given them a right to.

COMMENT.

FROM the several duties obliging all Christians in their personal capacity, (which are contained in the twelfth of this Epistle, and have been spoken to at large upon the three Sundays next before,) St. Paul does here proceed to such as are political, and oblige us as members of a civil body. A subject no less necessary than the former, and particularly so at the time of his writing to these Romans. As will easily be made appear by taking a very short view of the church's circumstances at that juncture.

It had been for some time an opinion too prevalent among the Jews, that they, as the peculiar people of God, could not be bound in conscience to obey any foreign jurisdiction exercised by heathens and idolaters, such as the Romans, their then conquerors, were. The greater part of the persons as yet gained over to the faith of the Gospel were such as had been trained up in the Jewish persuasion; men who still retained so profound a veneration for their former principles, that the apostles found great difficulty in bringing them off clear from such notions, inconsistent with their new profession, as the business of faith and worship was most immediately concerned in. This made the danger but too manifest, that they should likewise retain such other notions, relating to civil government, as the body of men they had lately left entertained and avowed. And though it do not, that I know of, appear from any history that the Christians truly orthodox gave occasion for being thought so, yet it is very plain the persecutors and opposers of the gospel, looking upon Christians as a spawn of the Jews, were willing to fix the same odious characters upon them; and pretended at least, as a colour for their severity and malice, constantly to think them enemies of the state.

It is easy to see how ill an influence such an opinion, if suffered,

must needs have upon the religion of Christ and all that should profess it. The benefits of society and civil rights are so many and so valuable, and do so entirely depend upon good government and order and peaceable submission to those in public stations, that men will naturally be very jealous of, very averse to, any set of people or principles that shall attempt to break in upon advantages so sensible and dear as these may claim to be to all mankind. The generality even of subjects would abhor a doctrine that should sow the seeds of discord and confusion; but it is never to be conceived how any one prince or ruler should have been reconciled to the faith upon the foot it then stood, had it propagated, justified, or in any degree countenanced sedition and licentiousness, by undertaking to set men free from their civil obligations, and dissolve the power and authority which governors were otherwise allowed to have upon their people when not Christians. And therefore in all the ancient apologies for our religion we find the authors particularly careful to wipe off this calumny, to prove the gospel, as it really is, the greatest security to all temporal jurisdiction, the surest promoter and best preserver of public order and quiet, the strongest support of kings, and the most effectual restraint upon subjects. So that, as few arguments were urged more frequently, we have some reason to believe that few contributed more successfully to recommend this religion to the general good acceptance of the world, or prepared men to hearken more favourably to its preachers, than the manifest tendency it had to the safety and welfare of mankind, the particular instructions it gave, the weighty obligations and motives it enforced them with, and the unparalleled examples it every day produced; for containing all sorts of men within the bounds of their proper station and duty, for rendering them useful and serviceable to society and government, for a zealous and active obedience to their superiors in all lawful instances, and for meek and patient suffering, under even unjust oppressions, rather than they would become instruments of disturbing the peace of the public or that of their own consciences.

The credit these principles and practices would bring to Christianity, the check they would be to the malice of its persecutors, and the mischiefs and obstructions which factious and turbulent spirits must needs have derived upon it, may reasonably be thought a main motive to St. Peter for insisting on this duty of obedience to civil powers, by any who attends to the connexion of his discourse in the second of his first Epistle, from the 12th verse and so on. There he begins with pressing such a behaviour in general as may secure Christians a good esteem with heathens, and convince them that all the ill reports concerning the men of this persuasion are utter calumny and malicious falsehood. Then, as the best expedient for this purpose, he proceeds upon submission to supreme and subordinate magistrates^d; enforces this as a singular instance of *well doing*, most agreeable to the will of God, most effectual for stopping the mouths and rectifying

the mistakes of such as did not or would not truly understand the nature and extent of Christian liberty. And thus he at last descends to specify the several duties incumbent upon men, according to the difference of their respective capacities and mutual relations to each other^e.

But St. Paul, in the portion of Scripture now in hand, treats of this matter more at large, and after another manner. He declares the nature of the duty enjoined, the universality of its obligation, the reasons upon which that obligation is founded, the danger of refusing to comply with it, the equity of making it good, the particular instances wherein it ought to be expressed; and that these are not merely a matter of secular convenience, or Christian prudence, but a part of religion, and such as directly bind the conscience. This is the substance of the doctrine recommended to our consideration at present, which I shall endeavour to give you a just sense of, by treating of it in as plain and practical a method as I am able; branching out the sum of what the Apostle seems to have intended we should collect from his discourse here into the following particulars:

1. First. By *the higher powers* it is certain are meant such authority and such persons vested with it as are civil and secular. For the third verse explains this by *rulers*, and the fourth by the character of *bearing the sword*, being *a revenger to execute wrath*; that is, having a right to inflict temporal punishments, such as extend even to death itself, where the offence provoking them is capital. And the sixth and seventh verse describe them as persons to whom *tribute* and *custom* are and ought to be paid. All which are prerogatives peculiar to the civil, and belong to no other power, nor to any invested with that, except the chief governor. But because this chief cannot satisfy the ends of government alone, it is necessary he should call in the assistance of other eyes and hands, and appoint them to act under him. These, in their proper spheres, are his representatives, and all their legal proceedings are his—his virtually, his originally; and consequently, we do not discharge our part to him, except we pay to all commissioned under him a subjection proportioned to that extent and degree of honour and authority which he hath thought fit to derive upon them. This is evident to any who at all consider the reason of the thing. But if it were not, St. Peter hath taken care to determine the case, and prevent all necessity of arguing upon the point, by commanding, in express terms, that we *submit to every ordinance of man, whether it be to the king, as supreme; or unto governors, as unto them that are sent by him, for the punishment of evildoers, and for the praise of them that do well*; and all this, he says, is to be done *for the Lord's sake*. The meaning whereof we shall best understand by considering what St. Paul hath urged more fully in the passage at present before us, which is,

2. Secondly, that all power and authority whatsoever is originally in and from God, and communicated by him to such persons, and in

such proportions as he sees requisite for the order and good government of this his own world. Accordingly the Apostle does upon this ground raise his argument for enforcing subjection *to the higher powers*, by putting men in mind whose sword they bear, and whence their jurisdiction is derived. For, says he, *there is no power but of God, and the powers that be are ordained of God.*

Authority and distinction are, in their own nature, so necessary to sociable creatures, that it does not seem possible to conceive how mankind could have subsisted without them, supposing the state of innocence to have continued. But as God, the universal cause, hath, in virtue of his being so, an indisputable dominion over all that proceed from him, so we may reasonably infer some right of government inseparable from the relation and character of a parent, as made by God the next and subordinate cause of the children who descend from him. And such a superiority in private families is so far from the effect of sin or any punishment of it, that we have a pattern of it even in the persons of the blessed Trinity themselves. But indeed, when we extend our thoughts to persons whom these engagements of blood and descent cannot reach, the case is altered. For then, how fondly soever some people may talk or think of a dominion or a slavery founded in nature, it should be very hard, methinks, to convince men, upon principles of reason, that as to their politic capacities they are not by nature free; and harder yet to advance such notions among Christians, who are taught by revelation where to lay this whole matter; who he is that makes one man to differ from, to be higher and better than another; and that every one in his own case may, to any sort of superior, whether by nature or by positive institution, allege those words of our Saviour to Pilate, *Thou couldest have no power at all against me, except it were given thee from above.*

For hence it follows undeniably, that no governor or parent, of what kind soever, can either have any power originally inherent in himself, or that he can draw it from any other source. And God, as he is a God of decency and order, and not of anarchy and confusion, so hath he taken all due care for the placing men in higher and lower stations, in such distances from and such influences over each other, as may best conduce to their mutual safety and quiet. And although these preeminences are what some are born to, yet still their title is from above. For the laws of nature and of nations, the civil constitutions of each country, and the voluntary compacts of particular persons, are but so many sanctions of Almighty God. They are inspired or confirmed or allowed by him. Government is indeed called *'the ordinance of man'*, in regard it is exercised by and contrived for the benefit and limited or directed by the laws of men. But still the right which government conveys is God's; and the different forms of government are but so many different methods of adjusting the measures and transferring the administration of it to particular uses and persons.

This then shews us the true state of all temporal jurisdiction, that it is not, cannot be universal and absolute, but must be limited, and depending and subordinate only. For which reason it is that the Scripture, when directing the duties of the several relations of superiors to inferiors, constantly remembers to mention their proper characters, so as to add withal an advertisement, to whom they stand accountable for the administration and regular discharge of them. The civil parent is for this reason styled ^k*the minister of God to men for their good*. The natural, advised that it is a duty incumbent upon him to ^l*bring up his children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord*; and that this authority over his own flesh is intrusted with him for this very purpose. The masters are commanded to treat their servants with justice and equity and great moderation; as considering that they ^m*have also a Master in heaven*. So that the post assigned to every one of these is, upon the matter, much the same with that of the centurion in the Gospel; who describes himself to be ⁿ*a man under authority, having at the same time soldiers under him*; and so owing and paying a like obedience to his superior officer, which he, by virtue of his commission, required from others of a lower rank. An obedience, to which they could not be engaged nor he make demand of, but only so far forth as he had been empowered by the giver of his commission; an obedience due to him in quality of a centurion, as an officer set over private soldiers; set so by one, who had power of him and them; whose higher elevation gave him the same right to command the centurions, that they had to command any common sentinel: or rather, to speak more strictly and properly, one who alone could, alone did command both; only with this difference, that the officer was commanded more immediately by the prince or general himself, as kings are by Almighty God; the soldiers by a deputy, as the people by the means and mediation of their princes: but still, principally and ultimately by God, whose vicegerents princes are, as the magistrates commissioned by them are theirs.

3. From hence we shall be able to satisfy ourselves, in the third place, how the performance of our duty to the civil magistrate becomes an act of religion. The true cause is, that God hath enjoined it, who alone hath power over the consciences of men; and therefore our obedience in this respect can be due primarily and properly to none but him, and to others purely upon his account. It is the Father and Ruler of spirits alone that can lay obligations upon the souls of men. So says St. James expressly, ^o*There is one lawgiver*, that is, one exclusive to all others, *who is able to save and to destroy*. For since that authority is manifestly defective which only prescribes rules for obedience, but cannot enforce those rules, by executing and inflicting punishments on the disobedient, and bestowing rewards and encouragements for fidelity and submission; the Apostle wisely added his reason in those last words, *who is able to save and to destroy*. And the argument in effect stands thus: No power but God's can

^k Ver. 4.^l Eph. vi. 4.^m Col. iv. 1.ⁿ Matt. viii. 9.^o James iv. 12.

punish or reward the souls of men; therefore no authority but God's can bind the souls of men. Which indeed we find to have been our Saviour's own argument too, when preparing his disciples for sufferings and persecutions: *I will forewarn you whom ye shall fear: fear not them which kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do; but fear him, which, after he hath killed, hath power to cast into hell.*

Men may be subject for wrath, (as St. Paul expresseth it,) that is, upon prudent and politic considerations, to preserve their liberties, estates, and lives; and for avoiding those temporal inconveniences which they who have long hands and long swords might otherwise bring upon them. But no other reason can render it necessary to be subject for conscience sake, and upon a principle of duty, except this single one premised by the Apostle here as the ground of that necessity; that our governors are *the ministers of God*, that he intrusted and invested them, that the authority they exercise is his, that his honour is concerned to take vengeance on them who shall presume to insult it, that the *despisers of them do despise him that sent them*; and therefore, *they that resist, because in resisting the power they resist the ordinance of God, do receive to themselves damnation.*

And when, in like manner, the same Apostle commands servants to *do the will of God from the heart, not with eyeservice, as men-pleasers, but as those that serve the Lord Christ*; when he presses the honour and observance due from children, because *this is right and pleasing to the Lord*; are not these plain intimations that the foundation of all power is one and the same, that every obligation to superiors is a knot of God's tying, and that the bonds of nature as well as those of civil society, voluntary contract, or personal consent, are the works of his hands, and receive the whole of their strength and binding virtue from being so?

4. Fourthly, this lets us in to a just and true notion of that duty required on our parts, styled by St. Peter, *submitting ourselves to every ordinance of man*; and by St. Paul here, *being subject unto the higher powers*. Expressions both of them cautious and prudent; and such as both suppose a possibility of some injunctions which we may not actually obey, and direct our behaviour in such cases of difficulty.

For if all power be God's, and whatever portion of it any mortal enjoys be derived from and held under him; if no capacity in the world, though never so high, never so sacred, can be any thing more than a deputation from Heaven; if the consciences of men be the peculiar dominion of the Father of spirits, a jurisdiction incommunicable, which no man may, no man can invade; it necessarily follows, that governors of every kind are bound to impose such demands only as are agreeable to the will of their and our common Father and Master and Lord: that they may not abuse their power to the prejudice of him whose it is, and who committed it to them in the quality of a trust, for which they are highly accountable. But if they do, that

then those who are under their direction must look to their first and highest engagement; and no pretence of complying with the orders of their immediate superiors will bear them out in actions manifestly displeasing to their great general Governor. That not only no positive evil must be committed, but no necessary duty must be left undone for any human respects whatsoever. That Daniel was no less concerned not to neglect God by omitting his constant addresses to him, than the three children not to deny God by committing idolatry against him. That all things else must give way in such cases, and, of what importance soever other observances may seem, still religion is the first and main point. This must be guarded at the hazard of all other interests and expectancies, which though never so just while consistent with our duty towards God, yet they lose all their weight and value, and the pursuits of them, instead of duties or engagements, do forthwith commence crimes and snares to our consciences without it.

But even where actual obedience is unlawful, subjection will continue necessary. For this the Scripture gives us many express precepts, and not only the history contained there, but that of all Christian antiquity, furnish great numbers of examples. Men who have immortalized the honour of their own memory and the Christian cause, by *enduring grief for conscience towards God, suffering wrongfully*. The very remembrance what these powers were at the time when this and St. Peter's Epistle were written is a forcible argument, and, if to a Nero such deference were required, proves that tyrannical abuse of power, cruel and unjust persecution, and difference in religion, are not alone sufficient to absolve subjects from their allegiance, and render violence and resistance lawful.

But it must be confessed withal, that between the case of Christians then and now there is on every material difference. For since the secular powers are come into the church, religion hath the countenance and support of the laws, and is become a part, the most valuable part, of men's property. Again, the forms and limitations of government, even in nations all agreeing in the profession of Christianity, are very different. So that though the same religion be common to all, yet are not the strength and security of it so with regard to its civil establishment. And these are matters with which the gospel meddles not. It does not undertake to model kingdoms and commonwealths by any fixed standard; but leaves every people so far to their own measures, to consult their own safety and convenience by such laws and conditions as are most wholesome, and best promote the public good. In short, it does not teach how to establish, but how to obey; is a guard for, but not a prescription to, any government; and enjoins subjection to *the powers that are*, without determining what sorts of powers shall be.

From hence I take it to be evident, that the measures of a subject's duty must needs vary according to the difference of power lodged in

the governors: that these are regulated and set out by the temper of that constitution under which men live. That when men cannot obey, yet neither can they be truly said *not to be subject*, when defending their persons or estates from suffering or oppression by all those methods which the laws of their country, no way repugnant to the laws of God, have put into their hands. But when no legal remedy can be had, then is the proper season of the subjection I now speak of, *not only to the good and gentle, but also to the forward and exorbitant*: then they must *commit their cause to God who judgeth righteously*, rest in the comforts of a good conscience, not doubt a reward of what they endure *for his sake*; and with all possible meekness, modesty, and good manners, respectful language and inoffensive behaviour, express their reverence of the character and persons even of wicked governors. Remembering that the *power is still from God*, though the abuse of it (permitted frequently as a scourge for the sins of a wicked people) be the suggestion and work of the devil.

5. Fifthly, in regard this of contradicting the law and will of God is the only reserved case which can justify our disobedience to the commands of our governors, it must needs concern every man very highly to have his conscience rightly informed about the nature of those things that make the matter of the laws imposed on him. To allege that the things are in themselves indifferent, can never be a good argument for declining our obedience. For by *indifferent* are only meant, such as might be either done or let alone, done thus or otherwise, were it not that the law of man hath interposed, by limiting or prescribing that which all antecedent obligations had left free to our own choice and discretion. And if our rulers have no power in these matters, they have not, strictly speaking, power in any. For whatsoever the light of reason and Scripture binds us to is of perpetual obligation, necessary and good without any human law, and not imposed by any such, so much as strengthened by a fresh approbation enjoined under new penalties and additional sanctions. Again, whatsoever reason or Scripture declares evil and sinful, no allowance, no command of man can either make it begin or cease to be so. The proper sphere of the civil power does therefore lie between those two extremes. A middle sort, neither good nor evil, necessary or unlawful, before the law; and afterwards necessary only because commanded, unlawful only because forbidden. For though the thing itself, abstracting from the command, be, yet obedience to any command not sinful never was, never can be, a matter of indifference.

Nor is the force of this obligation weakened, when things of this sort are enjoined in matters of religion. Because the difference of the object about which they are employed does not make any difference in the nature of the things themselves. And therefore, to require that we shew where God hath commanded these things is an unreasonable demand; because, to justify the magistrate's authority, it ought to suffice that they are nowhere forbidden. Religion indeed is God's peculiar, and all that is essential to it must come from him: but for the circumstances, which regard only the exercise and beauty

of it, these God hath left to be ordered as may best conduce to decency and convenience. These may vary in several places at one and the same time, or in the same place at different times: which shews how far distant they are from institutions strictly divine; that they are still of an indifferent temper, enjoined, altered, removed at pleasure, and as prudence shall direct. So that they come within the verge of the magistrate, by the same reason that all other indifferent things do; and even when enforced by a law are not thereby intended to be thought binding for their own sakes, but only on the account of those general rules which call for our obedience to these as well as any other ordinances of our governors, *for the Lord's sake.*

Nor will that apology of a scrupulous conscience, so common with weak people, avail much in this case. For a scruple implies want of evidence clear enough to determine the mind to either side of the question. And in a state of so much uncertainty, it is certainly safer to take that side of the particular matter in dispute which is supported by a plain command of obedience in general, and tends to preserve unity and peace and order, and reverence for authority, than to be carried aside by the unsettledness of our own mind, endanger our souls by the guilt of refusing an obedience which we only doubt may be unlawful; and by our example to scandalize our brethren, foment divisions and disorder in church or state, and bring our superiors and the laws into contempt.

6. I observe from hence, sixthly, the extent of this obligation, that it is universal, *Let every soul be subject.* Which plainly shews that no quality or order of men can possibly be exempted from it. That our blessed Lord condescended to these submissions is manifest from his paying tribute, from his discourses with Pilate, from the meekness wherewith he suffered, from his rebuke to Peter in the garden, and from the whole course of his deportment throughout the last tragical scene of his life. That the apostles never permitted their courage and zeal to transport them to any degree of insolence or opposition to the civil powers, appears from their patient and quiet enduring imprisonments, scourgings, and all manner of cruelty and injustice, inflicted for discharging the duties of their post, with which they declared no human authority could dispense. That the primitive Christians esteemed it their duty and their glory to reverence the ordinance of God, even in heathen emperors, to sacrifice their lives in the service of a persecuting state, and without resistance to be most injuriously and barbarously treated by their governors, all the apologies of the ancients testify: and that the coming in of the world to the church did not abridge the right of Christian princes, or procure an immunity to any of their subjects, we need no other evidence than that of a most holy prelate and most renowned expositor, who, after that accession, hath upon this very passage delivered his sense to this effect: *To shew that these commands extend to all men, to priests and monks, and not to the laity or men of secular employments only, he begins with*

these words, Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers: though thou be an apostle or an evangelist or a prophet, or of whatsoever character else thou art. For this subjection does not take off from the dignity of thy religious capacity. So little did those better ages form any imagination of setting up two supreme lords, the one in spirituals and the other in temporals; so much less of the temporal jurisdiction of any bishop paramount to all powers, in order to spirituals: so far were the then clergy from withdrawing their allegiance, in claiming an independence upon the civil governor: so ignorant of any privilege which their function brought, other than that of outshining their flocks, as in others so in these (than which none are more truly Christian) virtues, of a most inviolable loyalty, affectionate obedience, and profoundest reverence to the princes set over them by God.

7. Lastly, the passage now under consideration represents to us the equity of this subjection, from the benefits which government brings and secures to mankind. To this in general it is that we owe the support and countenance of virtue, the chastisement and suppression of vice, the preservation of our just rights, the establishment and security of property and order; which those, who for private ends are forward to disturb and invade, would be an over-match for the peaceable and conscientious, were they not restrained by the fears of present punishments, and terrified by necessary examples of justice upon evil-doers. And if it happen, as sometimes it will, that in the exercise of such power hardships should fall upon particular persons, yet for the bearing such with patience, it is a proper argument to submit, that the very abuse of power is not attended with consequences in any degree so destructive, so mischievous and dreadful, as the subversion and total dissolution of that power. For this unhinges the whole frame at once, and diffuses the calamity it pretends to redress. Our governors, though next in elevation to God, do not cease to be men: they continue still liable to passions and resentments like those of common men; and to mistakes and crafty insinuations as much more than common men as their sphere of business is larger, and reduces them to a greater necessity of seeing and hearing with other eyes and ears. All which should prevail for greater allowances and more candid constructions of their management, to be made by those who do not discern the difficulties they are under, and judge unreasonably, by the narrow view of one small part, what methods are practicable and proper for the good of the whole body.

In short, the public is their constant care; to this they sacrifice their time, their ease, their thoughts; and therefore the supporting their dignity ought to be a public expense. He that defrauds them does in truth wrong himself, and the head can no more suffer alone in the political than it can in the natural body. So that even interest and self-love, and ingenuity and gratitude, do all conspire to persuade fidelity and subjection; and God, in this as in other religious duties, hath only enjoined us to do that in obedience to him, which, were it not commanded, is most beneficial to ourselves.

For I cannot but assure myself, that were St. Paul's doctrine here,

and these observations upon it, duly attended to, they would be an excellent rule of behaviour, and of infinite importance to the welfare of all the world, both for this and the next life. They would prevent all sinful compliances on the one hand, and all peevish obstinacies on the other; would effectually dispose us to revere all just authority, and conform to every innocent ordinance of our superiors, and render us bold as lions in refusing whatever tends to the dishonour of God and the defiling our own consciences.

They would likewise teach governors equity and moderation, piety and prudence; would inspire a most affectionate tenderness for the safety and quiet of the souls under their charge, and the strictest circumspection not to exceed the bounds and intent of their commission; constant endeavours that all their injunctions be profitable and good, promoting edification and godliness, not arbitrary and rigorous and ensnaring. In short, these reflections would make them fathers of their people indeed, and children of the Most High, in the best and noblest sense; ornaments and honours to the authority they bear, and images so lively of Him who trusts it to them, so benign, so beneficial, that their subjects would then say of them, what they of Lycaonia said of the apostles, *The gods are come down to us in the likeness of men.*

THE FOURTH SUNDAY AFTER THE EPIPHANY.

THE GOSPEL. Matt. viii. 23.

23 *And when he was entered into a ship,* 23. ^aJesus (after having his disciples followed him. done the miracles before related in Capernaum) was disposed towards the evening to go into the country that lies on another part of the lake of Genesareth: and finding some vessels lie ready for his purpose, ^bhe and his disciples went on board one of them; the rest of the ships bearing him company in the voyage.

24 *And, behold, there arose a great tempest in the sea, insomuch that the ship was covered with the waves: but he was asleep.* 24. ^bPresently after they launched out, (as he was asleep upon a pillow in the hinder part of the ship,) a storm arose, so violent, that the ship took in a great quantity of water, and was like to be cast away.

25 *And his disciples came to him, and awoke him, saying, Lord, save us: we perish.* 25, 26. Hereupon his disciples ran to him, and awoke him in terms of the utmost consternation and distrust. Which he reproved them for, and then said to the wind and the water, Peace,

26 *And he saith unto them, Why are ye fearful, O ye of little faith? Then he arose, and rebuked the winds and the sea; and there was a great calm.*

^a Mark iv. 35.

^b Ver. 36.

^b Mark iv. 37, 38; Luke viii. 23.

be still! This powerful word was immediately obeyed; for the wind ceased, and the sea was smooth, as soon as he had spoken it.

27 *But the men marvelled, saying, What manner of man is this, that even the winds and the sea obey him!* 27. Which sudden change and the cause of it when they of his own and the other

ships' company understood, they were astonished at his power, and concluded that he must needs be a very extraordinary person, who by this miracle plainly made it appear that the winds and the seas were absolutely at his own disposal.

28 *And when he was come to the other side into the country of the Gergesenes, there met him two possessed with devils, coming out of the tombs, exceeding fierce, so that no man might pass by that way.* 28. *Upon his landing in the Gergesenes' country, in that part adjacent to Gadara, two men possessed with devils met him, (one of

them having an unclean spirit, and himself a Gadarene, so very fierce, that no chains or fetters could bind him, but he was night and day naked among the tombs, crying and cutting himself with stones :) this man, or the spirit in him, upon Jesus demanding his name, said it was Legion, because many devils had entered into him.

29 *And, behold, they cried out, saying, What have we to do with thee, Jesus, thou Son of God? art thou come hither to torment us before the time?* 29. These men met Jesus, and the spirit (in that fierce one) desired him not to punish them before their

time, (nor to send them out of that country, or into the deep.)

30 *And there was a good way off from them an herd of many swine feeding.* 30, 31. But (since they had been commanded to

31 *So the devils besought him, saying, If thou cast us out, suffer us to go away into the herd of swine.* come out of the man) to permit them to enter into a herd of swine, which (to the

number of two thousand) were feeding at some distance (in the mountains near the sea).

32 *And he said unto them, Go. And when they were come out, they went into the herd of swine: and, behold, the whole herd of swine ran violently down a steep place into the sea, and perished in the waters.* 32. Jesus, having shewed his mercy in a miraculous restraint of their power over men, suffered them to use it upon the swine, (by which the force, the possession,

and the number of these devils, and consequently his power over them, was rendered more unquestionable; and the owners of those creatures punished for the contempt of the Jewish law;) whereupon the whole herd straight ran down a precipice, and were choked in the water.

33 *And they that kept them fled, and went their ways into the city, and told every thing, and what was befallen to the possessed of the devils.* 33. The keepers hereupon made haste to give notice of this whole matter in all neighbouring places.

34 *And, behold, the whole city came out* 34. This news brought a

* Mark v; Luke viii. 26, 27. ἐκ τῆς πόλεως.

d Comp. Mark v; Luke viii.

to meet Jesus: and when they saw him, vast concourse of people together, (who found the late of their coasts. fierce possessed man sitting clothed and in his perfect senses at 'Jesus' feet, and were fully informed by those that had been eyewitnesses of the whole transaction, how so sudden and wonderful a change had been wrought;) and (partly from a dread of his power, partly from grief for the loss they had sustained by the swine) they entreated Jesus not to make any longer stay among them.

COMMENT.

In treating of this day's Gospel, I must again content myself with speaking to the former only of two miracles, which it offers to our consideration; 'that of our blessed Master's proving his authority not over the minds of men only, but over subjects in appearance much less likely to be at its disposal, the winds and the seas. Of which we have here a very amazing and particular account, from the 23rd to the 27th verse of the chapter inclusively.

An account capable of very good improvement, from these three things (if diligently observed) in it.

I. First. The danger here described.

II. Secondly. The behaviour of our Lord's disciples under it: and,

III. Thirdly. The deliverance from it.

I. First. In order to a just apprehension of the danger, the following circumstances should be attended to. That presently upon their launching forth, there arose a *tempest in the sea*, and this so furious that *the ship was even covered with the waves*: that all this happened notwithstanding Christ himself was present, and that, as a farther aggravation of their terror and danger, *he was asleep too*, when it thus threatened their immediate destruction.

Now from these several circumstances laid together, I have a fair occasion for making some reflections upon the providence of Almighty God, with regard to the difficulties and afflictions in which good men in general so often find themselves involved. For those disciples may be very reasonably looked upon as at that time the church representative; and the hazard they were in, as a figure of those extremities to which any of Christ's faithful followers shall in any after-ages be reduced. The reasonableness whereof I must now consider, not in its utmost latitude, but so far only as the case in hand suggests matter for it.

I. First then. I take it from hence to be very evident that no man, though never so holy, never so acceptable and dear to God, hath reason to promise himself uninterrupted peace or prosperity; or that even those actions of his life which best express a steady and zealous regard to his duty shall be a security from trouble and hazard. Could a dependence like this be justified in any man, our Lord's constant companions seem to have had the fairest title to it. And yet, if from

the several relations of this miracle we may be allowed to form conjectures, though other vessels were engaged in the same voyage, the storm seems to have borne more hard upon none than that in which a God incarnate and his disciples were embarked. Thus his divine wisdom saw fit to permit it then, and thus he often does now. And to take off all vain imaginations of good men being perfectly exempted from dangers and calamities, he did in much humility condescend to be himself tost and driven about by the force and fury of that tempest; that so, in all the stormy cares and raging billows of a fickle and boisterous world, the best of his disciples might apply to their own circumstances the warning elsewhere left to the first planters of the Christian faith: *The servant is not greater than his Lord. If they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you.*

Christ promises, it is true, to be with his church *always, even to the end of the world.* And he is actually and properly present with every faithful Christian in every innocent and virtuous action. He is yet in a more peculiar manner so in the discharge of those duties which have a more eminent and immediate tendency to the advancement of religion and his own glory. Not present now indeed as when conversing in the days of his flesh upon earth, yet so as ministers an equal assurance of his readiness and power to help and to protect us. But still, experience proves that both the church in general, and good people in particular, have laboured under sore trials, and suffered many hard things; not only on the account of private faults or failings, where some offence might be given; nor merely in matters of indifferent temper, where perverse minds are apt to take offence, even when none was given; but in their best and most praiseworthy actions, nay, not only in them, but for them too. Their very virtues have been so far from a defence, as to expose and render them a prey. And matters have often come to such extremity, that *in the noise of the waves, and the overflowings of ungodliness,* men's persons and their fortunes have been swallowed up in the storm, for no other reason but their constant refusal to *make shipwreck of faith and of a good conscience.*

For all this we can easily account, so far as the malice of the devil, and the instruments of it, wicked men, are concerned. It is but natural to suppose that these should unite and bend their utmost endeavours against persons of integrity and piety. But in regard there is a God who sees and overrules all things, a God who hath declared himself and his honour interested in the cause of righteous and excellent men, how comes it to pass that he does not espouse such more visibly, and interpose more powerfully, that he does not control and defeat their enemies, and make them know to their cost that all their spite is impotent and their devices vain? And yet this is not done: the oppressions and insults of base and barbarous wretches are often not prevented: and the good are not only assaulted from that quarter, but sometimes from sorrows and dangers that

speaking a more immediate hand of God. Such was the tempest in the text; such are many troubles and disasters in human life: and as in that Christ was asleep, so in these God seems to take little or no notice of his suffering servants. For the reconciling all which with a just and holy, a wise and watchful Providence, I beg it may be considered in the

II. Second place; that though the best men and the best actions are not secured from sufferings and dangers, yet are those sufferings and dangers always directed to the good of the parties concerned, and ordained by Providence for wise reasons and excellent purposes. Of these, many may be unknown to us; and of those that are or may be known, some are without the compass of my present design. For this reaches no farther than to our adversities in proportion to the case of the disciples here; and consequently, to such reasons and ends alone as suit with those whereby we may reasonably gather our blessed Lord induced to suffer the coming of this distress upon them.

1. One of these reasons seems to have been, the bringing them to a modest and humble opinion of themselves. Mention is frequently made of their failing in this point, and how exceeding forward they were in giving to themselves the preference, not only above the rest of the world, but also before one another. Now the honour of retaining to, and an intimate friendship and acquaintance with, their divine Master, the partaking in his privacies, and being there let into the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, were privileges exceeding valuable in themselves, likely to draw upon them the respects of others, and not less so to beget in themselves pleasing imaginations of somewhat more than ordinary that should dispose our Lord thus to distinguish, and as it were cull them out from the rest of mankind. Now what more proper to refute these notions, and prevent their mischievous consequences, than putting those supposed excellencies to the touch, and convincing them by such an experiment how little they were removed above common men, how far from answering the glorious ideas which they had formed of their mighty proficiency, and yet untried virtue?

Thus we have reason to believe good men in general dealt with, whose prosperity is but too prone to turn God's blessings into poison, and taint the virtue they have with fond and lofty conceits of their own merit. And it is, no doubt, an instance of the wisdom and goodness of Providence to shew such to themselves, to instruct them by sufferings and dangers, and seemingly to neglect and forsake them for a while, that they may feel their own weakness when the enemy attacks them; and by so sensible a proof conclude, that how great soever they may represent themselves to themselves, and whatever imaginary fights and triumphs they may act over in their own fancies, yet in truth that *strength which faints in the day of adversity* is but, can be but *small*; and that which resists and conquers in such a day is not their own, but his whose grace enables them to stand, and gets itself glory of their infirmities and temptations. Which leads me to

2. A second reason for Christ's permitting this difficulty upon his

disciples, even that they might hereby attain to just apprehensions of his power and goodness, and higher degrees of faith and trust in him. Nobody need be told how quick a sense we have where our own persons or interests are touched, and what deep impressions those dangers and deliverances make, which when our brethren only are concerned are entertained but coldly. Thus the present terror and distress would not fail to affect the disciples more tenderly, and to have a more vigorous and lasting influence, than their seeing our Lord cleanse the lepers, enlighten the blind, heal the sick at a distance, raise the dead with a word, or any the most amazing instances upon others, of which they were only spectators.

And so we may say in general, that afflictions are of use even to good men, for refreshing their memories, rousing their thoughts, and settling their affiance in the Almighty. For though such persons apply themselves more than common men do to weigh the several dispensations of Providence, and make some profit of whatever is remarkable in the fortunes of others, yet even thus good men will still be men; and while they are so, they will not be able to consider such events with equal warmth and affection as when the like shall happen to themselves.

And as this expedient is of advantage to us, from the difference of concern for other people in comparison of ourselves, so is it likewise with regard to each man's private affairs, considered singly and apart. For it is very visible, that nothing which does not make some great change in our affairs affects us strongly or sticks long by us. The same good Providence contrives our preservation from and our escapes out of danger. But, notwithstanding, nothing is more evident, than that constant health and safety do by no means move our spirits, and awaken our sense and praise of the Divine goodness, like a recovery from sickness just despaired of, or a rescue from some common and imminent ruin. They who judge rightly will discern the hand of God in both: but few attend to this in ordinary cases; and they who do carry their thoughts so far feel their passions more powerfully wrought upon to acknowledge and be thankful for it in the one than the other. So that *it is good* for us, even in this respect, to be sometimes *in trouble*, for did we not feel smart and danger, we should never know the pleasure of ease and deliverance. And it may be said with great truth, that much of the sweets of life would be lost, were there no mixture of bitter and distasteful to heighten their relish and recommend them to us.

3. Thirdly. The providence of God might intend by the danger in my text, as it certainly does by the trials of other good people, to exercise these disciples, and train them up to constancy and perfection in virtue. These were the persons upon whom the weight of establishing the gospel was to lie. This they were to effect in despite of indignities and reproaches, malice and unrelenting barbarity, oppositions on every side, and persecutions in every place. Fit then it was to inure these champions betimes, to shew them death in its most frightful form; and at the same time make them sensible that he who could

quiet the rage of the seas could not want power to subdue the *madness of the people*.

Every good man, it must be allowed, is not designed for such vast and hazardous undertakings; but every man hath a post appointed him by God, and the character of a Christian to maintain. And few arrive to any uncommon excellencies in this station, except such as make their way up to them through sufferings. Hence it is we commonly call afflictions *trials*, because they are the test of a man's virtue, and discover what he really is: the very proof which the devil desired to bring Job's integrity to. They have effects in some measure like high winds and thunder in the air, or like the fermentation of humours in bodies; for as health and wholesomeness could not be preserved without these, so is the soul confirmed by some returns of violent agitation, that awaken and exert its powers in sufferings and difficulties. And what degree of these is necessary the great Physician of souls best knows, and therefore our care must be to submit to his prescriptions. Thus much, however, we may see plainly, that the more familiar these things are made to us, the more will that terror and surprise wear off, which disables our first encounters from all that steadiness and decency that becomes us. And how subject to such consternations very good men are, may be gathered from my second general head.

II. The behaviour of these disciples under their present danger. The 25th verse tells us *they came to Jesus, and awoke him*; and herein, no doubt, they are our examples. They teach us whither to flee in the necessity of our affairs and the anguish of our souls; that Christ is a sure refuge, our only support when human remedies fail; and *if he be asleep*, that is, if we be not answered at the first call, not to give over or grow weary of praying, but to exalt our voices and double our importunity, till we receive such help in time of need as his infinite wisdom sees expedient for us. Thus far, I say, the disciples did their own duty, and have directed us in ours. But somewhat else, it is evident, there was wherein they failed, and for which they are reproved at the 26th verse; he saith unto them, *Why are ye so fearful, O ye of little faith?* or, as another evangelist expresses it, *How is it that ye have no faith?* Mark iv. 40; and St. Luke, *Where is your faith?*

By this it appears that, in a season of peril and great tribulation, it is not enough that we betake ourselves to no unlawful means for escape, or that we do not rest entirely upon human help; no, nor yet that we come straight to God, and earnestly apply to him for relief. All this the disciples did, and yet they were guilty of something so blamable, that, notwithstanding the imminent hazard of all their lives, our Lord, according to the account here, saw it reasonable to rebuke them first, and then the sea. Now it must needs be of great importance rightly to understand wherein this particular defect lay, that, as their excellencies provoke our imitation, so their failings may be so many seasonable preventions to us. And from the several hands compared together who have delivered an account of this matter, it is beyond

dispute, that their fear was charged upon them as an argument of their wanting faithⁱ.

But doth faith require that a man become blind and insensible? Or was it reasonable to imagine, when the winds roared, the seas raged, the vessel was sinking, death pouring in upon them with every wave, and their Master asleep, he, in whom alone any hope could be left, to their thinking, deaf and unconcerned all the while—can it, I say, be conceived that men in these distressed circumstances should feel no terror, betray no disorder? To reproach them for passions so interwoven with, weaknesses so inseparable from, our common constitution and frame, is, in effect, to reproach them for being men. And whatever wicked people may suggest, or ignorant people suppose, we may be very confident that no command in the gospel, no disposition or duty expected from us, was ever designed to destroy, but all tend to exalt and perfect human nature.

Fear then, in general, could not be their fault, but some quality with which it was then attended; in the discovering whereof the two other evangelists will assist us. St. Luke relates the manner of their application to our Lord in these words, *Master, Master, we perish*; St. Mark in these, *Master, carest thou not that we perish?* In agreement with them St. Matthew must be understood; and then, *Lord, save us, we perish*, is an exclamation full of horror, confusion, and despair, in men that gave up all for lost and gone. And this, no doubt, was the disciples' weakness and want of faith, that they suffered the sense of the present danger to drive them to despondency; such as suspected either the goodness or the power of Christ to help in this extremity, and seemed to say either that their safety was no part of his concern, and he cared not if they were lost; or else, that this was a difficulty too mighty for him, notwithstanding the many miracles they had seen ought to have persuaded the contrary. And thus the language of their fainting hearts bore some resemblance to that reproach at his crucifixion, *He saved others, himself he cannot save*.

The improvement then which it behoves us to make of this example is that of condemning, lamenting, and setting ourselves resolutely to struggle with those dejections and misgivings of mind which calamities and fears are apt to cast us into. To see and consider our dangers and our wants, so as to quicken our zeal and take sanctuary in God, and still to believe him a sure sanctuary, even when human helps prove broken reeds to us; not then to limit his hand, or measure it by the weak arm of flesh, but rest assured that his power is always invincible, and his wisdom and mercy incomprehensible. To seek him by prayer, and qualify ourselves for his favour by a holy importunity and a strong faith. In short, to settle this one, this most important truth upon your minds,—that, let our enemies be never so many or never so mighty, our adversities never so grievous, our dangers never so formidable, still nothing can either hind the hands or bound the love of

ⁱ Ver. 26; Mark iv. 40; Luke viii. 26.

^j Luke viii. 24.

^k Mark iv. 38.

God. But he always can and always will deliver, and do as he knows to be most for the benefit of them that serve him faithfully. An eminent instance whereof my

III. Third and last head gives us: the deliverance, I mean, of the disciples, related in these words, *Then he arose, and rebuked the winds and the sea, and there was a great calm.* Upon which I shall very briefly make two remarks; one, of the tenderness and compassion, another, of the extent and perfection of the assistance we may depend upon from the goodness of our God and only Saviour.

1. His compassion, first, is observable, in condescending to the requests of these disciples, though not recommended by all the perfection it ought to have had. The philosophers heretofore, in their distinctions of fear, allowed a sort of it, which it was no disparagement to a man of virtue and courage to be affected with¹. And our blessed Lord, who made us, and who vouchsafed in his own person to feel the infirmities of flesh and blood, does upon all occasions shew himself tender and gentle to them, and willing to cherish the first seeds and beginnings of a faith yet feeble in us. This is evident in fact, that the men who, in their cooler thoughts, have the justest notions of God and his providence, do nevertheless, in some extremities, find their understandings disturbed, their thoughts confounded, and reason and religion for a while jostled aside. In such cases it is our duty to check the disorders that we cannot absolutely prevent; to call up, as soon as may be, the powers of consideration and faith, and lay fast hold on that hope which is deservedly styled *the anchor* of tossed and tempest-beaten souls. And, provided this be done, our frailties and surprises shall never be charged to our account, but will certainly move pity, and shew us the truth and faithfulness of God by opening the way to a glorious and happy deliverance from the temptations we lie under.

2. And for this hope my second remark furnishes ground sufficient; for our Saviour *rebuked the winds and the seas*, and even those deaf and merciless elements heard and obeyed his voice. The like effectual change shall always follow when God gives the word; no danger, no opposition can stand before it. The fiercer and more dreadful these are, the more only they contribute to the rendering his power sensible and his goodness signal in that complete deliverance, that succeeding calm, which at once will refresh us after and reward us for our past fears and troubles. So great reason hath every Christian to support himself with those words of the holy Psalmist, *What though the earth be moved, and the hills carried into the midst of the sea; though the waters thereof rage and swell, and the mountains shake at the tempest of the same? God is in the midst of us, therefore shall we not be removed; God shall help us, and our enemies shall melt away. The Lord is our light and our salvation, whom then shall we fear? The Lord is the strength of our life, of what then should we be afraid?*

To conclude in a word. This gospel sets before us a lively emblem of God's dealing with his servants, and a plain intimation both what

¹ Metus qui cadere potest in constantem virum. Cic. Offic. l. 1.

² Psalm xlii. xvii.

we are to expect from him, and what we are to do to justify our dependence upon him. Violent shakings and strong convulsions are incident to the fortunes, not of private men only, but of communities and kingdoms; this is the lot of the best, of the greatest, of the church, of the whole world. God hath nowhere engaged to keep off assaults and temptations. He thinks it encouragement enough to sustain us under, succour us in, and, at his own due time, to deliver us out of our dangers and distresses. When therefore these attack us, either in our personal or our public capacity, our business must be to seek his protection by earnest and constant prayer, and thus to silence all those wicked distrusts which frail nature, the prevalence of sensual affections and the extremity of afflictions, are too apt to betray us into; to remember, that though ourselves are weak, yet our Redeemer is mighty; that *the stormy wind*, which cannot rise but at his *word*, shall, when he pleases to command, be immediately layed by it again; that he is disposed to look upon our sufferings and infirmities with a very tender eye; and, provided we be not wanting to our duty, he will accept that most pious and most necessary prayer which our church, in allusion to the passage now before us, hath taught us to put up this day.

Let us come therefore to the throne of grace in an humble sense of *being set in the midst of so many and great dangers, that by reason of the frailty of our nature we cannot always stand upright; and may he grant us such strength and protection, as may support us in all dangers, and carry us through all temptations; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.*

THE FIFTH SUNDAY AFTER THE EPIPHANY.

THE COLLECT.

O LORD, we beseech thee to keep thy church and household continually in thy true religion; that they who do lean only upon the hope of thy heavenly grace may evermore be defended by thy mighty power^a; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

THE EPISTLE. Coloss. iii. 12.

12 Put on therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, long-suffering;

12. Since therefore God hath so graciously chosen, sanctified, and loved you that are Christians, let it

^a Matt. xiii. 25, 38.

13 *Forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any: even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye.* be your care to behave yourselves as becomes men thus favoured. Shew the tenderest compassion, the

most sincere affection to one another, have lowly opinions of yourselves, be slow to wrath, and patient under injuries, not hasty to revenge, but imitating the goodness of Christ to sinners in your carriage to those who have wronged or offended you.

14 *And above all these things put on charity, which is the bond of perfectness.* 14. Especially let the love of your brethren, founded

15 *And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to the which also ye are called in one body; and be ye thankful.* on the love of God, and on his love to you, be your constant principle and practice;

for this will make you perfect in all manner of good works: and in any difference, let the peace God requires of you be the umpire to compose it, remembering how he hath united you into one body, his church, which is a mercy that calls for your greatest thanks.

16 *Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord.* 16. Let the doctrine of the gospel be well studied, and liberally communicated, and wisely employed by you:

and in all your assemblies give praises to God in such holy hymns and psalms, as either the Spirit shall dictate or your own piety compose, so as may tend most to the instruction and edification of others, and best express your own thankfulness.

17 *And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him.* 17. And in all your actions and words, whether those of solemn worship or others, address yourselves to God,

and expect his acceptance by Jesus Christ; for he is the only person that our prayers and praises must be offered by to his Father under the gospel, as all mercies are derived down to us through him, for which we pray to or praise God.

COMMENT.

The duties ^b urged in this Epistle at the 12th, 13th, 14th, and 15th verses, the obligations we all have to them as Christians, the ^c high commendation of charity, the common source and sum of them all, and the reasonableness ^d of *forbearing and forgiving*, after Christ's example, have had their places of being considered already.

My purpose at present is to fix on the subject of the 16th verse, which interpreters have generally agreed to understand of those ejaculations and pious lands, which Christians heretofore were so famous for, as even by heathens ^e and enemies to have special notice taken how constant and considerable a part of Divine worship they made.

^b Epistle for 1, 2, 3 Sunday after Epiphany.

^d Epistle for Fourth Sunday in Advent.

^c Epistle for Advent Sunday.

^e Plin. lib. 10. Epist. 37.

These (as is probable, not only from this and another parallel text to the Ephesians, but a passage very remarkable in the first to the Corinthians) were such effusions of praise, as the Holy Ghost (among other extraordinary gifts seasonable and necessary for those early days of the gospel) infused into souls transported with zeal and gratitude and love. But in regard those gifts have long since ceased, and we are left to stated methods; in regard we have still some such helps to our devotion, as we may be very confident did originally proceed from the same divine Spirit, (though in an age far distant from our own;) I hope it will not be judged improper, because it is our own fault if it be unprofitable, for me at this time to set before you the excellence and usefulness of the Book of Psalms. The rather, because they are a constant portion of our public service, and seem by the wisdom of our church to be recommended with a distinguishing concern to our study and remembrance, by being so much oftener read in our assemblies than any other part of God's holy word.

I shall not stay to insist (though somewhat might be said to good purpose on that subject) upon the advantage this collection hath by being of poetical composition. It shall suffice to observe, that this is designed, as all other poetry is or ought to be, for instruction and delight. My business shall be to shew how well the Psalms acquit themselves of both these offices, and consequently how wise a choice they make who pitch upon these for a constant companion, both of their more retired thoughts and their more public exercises of devotion.

1. And first, for the instructing part: they who at all attend to the matter here treated of cannot but see the justice of those ancients who recommend this book as the *marrow and epitome of divine knowledge, the treasury and storehouse of piety and prayer.*

The ground of true religion is laid in right and worthy apprehensions of God, of his providence, his justice, his power and mercy. And where shall we be better furnished with, whence hope for more lively representations of, these so necessary truths? How becomingly do the sixth, the xxxiiiid, the civth, and cxlviiiith psalms, besides sundry other incidental passages, declare the efficacy of that Almighty Word, which did but *speak, and all things were made, commanded only, and forthwith they stood fast!* The beauty and order of the creatures, the wise uses assigned to each of them, the eternal bounds which they cannot pass, the glory of the heavens, the riches of the earth and seas, the wondrous and profitable variety that fills them, and the perpetual necessary dependence of all these upon the kindly influence and prolific goodness of the first Cause, cannot be suggested in ideas more lofty, in terms more suitable to the dignity of the subject, than that Spirit which made and governs them all hath here infused into the holy author.

The effects of Divine Providence in general, that *light of God's countenance* that shines with a peculiar lustre upon the person and the

posterity of the good man ; those guards of *angels*, that *pitch their tents* round about his house, and chase away the powers of darkness from their beloved charge ; that distinguishing care, which *saves the souls* of such *from death*, and *feeds them in the time of dearth*, that *keeps all their bones*, so that *not one of them is broken*, shelters them *under his wings*, and secures them *under his feathers*, and even then, when *thousands fall beside them*, and *ten thousands at their right hand*, forbids *any plague from coming nigh* their persons or their dwellings, are admirably described in the xxxiiird, xxxivth, and xcist Psalms. All which are backed with so many instances and experiments in other places relating to David's own case, that in speaking his own sense and soul he fills every faithful Christian with holy confidence and great tranquillity, when dangers and calamities make their boldest approaches.

The direful vengeance that awaits the ungodly, that *fire and brimstone*, that *storm and tempest*, which shall be *their portion to drink*, their confusions and horrors, and unavoidable destruction, are painted in such ghastly colours at the xith, xviiith, xxxvth, lxixth, and cixth Psalms, as will, if any thing will, strike a damp into the wicked, chill all their blood, quell their proud wrath, and almost force them to reflect, though most unwillingly, that *there is verily a God that judgeth in the earth*, a God that *will not forget the poor helpless man*, nor *suffer the patient abiding of the meek to perish for ever* ; but will *put the mightiest and the boldest sinners of them all in fear*, and *make them know themselves to be but men*.

These are evidences of a God and Providence, which all who believe such things would naturally expect. But there is one thought more peculiarly David's own ; for he helps us against the difficulties too which have staggered so many in this belief. His xxxvith, lxxiiird, and xciind Psalms do with wonderful dexterity unfold the mystery of good men being destitute, afflicted, tormented, while the evil and oppressors live at their ease, full of health and plenty and power. These assure us that *the end of the perfect and upright man is sure to be peace at the last* ; that *the righteous and their seed are never utterly forsaken* ; that this short imaginary happiness of the wicked is but like *the crackling of thorns under a pot*, a blaze soon kindled, and soon out again ; that it is a subject to exercise our patience, but by no means fit to provoke our envy ; that the longer they are spared the higher the arm is lifted, and the heavier at last the blow will fall ; for *when all the workers of wickedness do flourish and look gay and green as the grass*, it is only to reserve them for *the fiery oven*, and that *they may be destroyed for ever*. In a word, though other considerations may stop short, yet if we will bear David company *into the house of God*, that is, apply ourselves to revealed truths, *we shall understand the end of these men*, that the *high places where they stand are slippery*, that they *suddenly and surprisingly consume, perish, and come to a fearful end*, and that their glories, and even the remembrance and very image of them, *vanish like a dream when one awaketh out of sleep* : that these promiscuous dispensations are fitted for excellent improvements, to convince men of the folly of sin even in its most pompous and alluring circumstances,

and of the vanity of the world, even in its most charming dress; to shew how little those things must needs be worth which God permits them whom he least loves so plentifully to enjoy; to teach us where to fix our hopes and our affections; that we ought to *have none in heaven itself but him, much less any thing upon earth that we desire in comparison of him*; and that our great endeavour and most earnest wish should be, to be *guided by his counsel, and after that to be received with glory*; that when not only all the world without and its false comforts forsake us, but when even a part of our own selves, this body, shall, as very shortly it must, decay and die and moulder into dust, *when our flesh and our heart fail*, God may then, then especially, *be the strength of our heart and our portion for ever*.

Where, again, can we see the gratefulness of virtue set off to better advantage, where the deformity of vice more justly exposed? The equity of God's laws, their happy influences on all that submit to them, the wisdom, the comforts, the delights of religion, are so admirably characterized in the sixth, eighth particularly, and in several other Psalms, that we may truly say, as no subject is so noble, so none ever had better reason done it than this. Nor does all end in a mere commendation, but useful and seasonable instructions are frequently intermixed, with regard to particular occasions and exigencies. Nothing that can adorn or accomplish a good man is omitted; no sin almost but hath its temptations and snares detected. And we may promise ourselves much the same security and present remedy from these holy writings that Saul felt from their author. For we no sooner betake ourselves to the divine applications of this wise charmer, than the powers of hell are bound up and subdued, and the evil spirit finds itself unable to stand before them.

Farther yet, here are laid the foundations of Christianity so very perspicuous, that no book in the Old Testament is so often referred to throughout the whole course of the New. The most eminent mysteries of our faith, the sufferings and death, resurrection and ascension of our blessed Lord, the malice of the stubborn Jews, the treachery of Judas, the success of the Gospel, the calling of the Gentiles, the kingdom of antichrist, foretold in terms clear and peremptory enough to condemn all the gainsaying and unbelievers. So that nothing could be better accommodated for informing our judgments in all necessary points of faith and practice: and, if we next proceed to the other use I mentioned, it will appear that they are no less fitted to delight and entertain our affections, than they are proved already to enlighten our understandings.

The delight I mean is a truly rational and innocent delight, such as consists in moving the passions sweetly by tender thoughts and proper expressions, that strike in with the virtuous inclinations of the mind, assist and improve nature, suit the several exigencies of human life, and the different affections they of necessity raise in us.

And upon this subject, where shall I begin, where make an end? For what fortune, what circumstance is it, to which the use of these heavenly meditations does not accommodate itself?

Do the riches and glories of the world exalt our spirits, and make our breasts overflow with joy? Here are the noblest raptures of praise and thanksgiving; such as at once express our satisfaction, and direct our views to the bountiful hand that gave it. Do those gayeties (as God knows they are but too apt to do) swell our minds with carnal pride and a false security, with vain imaginations of our own sufficiency, a haughty contempt of those to whom Providence hath dealt them less liberally, and a wicked forgetfulness of our great Benefactor? Here are most seasonable remonstrances of the falsehood and fickleness of all worldly advantages, the frailty of our nature, and the shortness of our own continuance. That *man is as grass, and his most flourishing estate like a flower of the field, which as soon as the wind goeth over it is gone, and the place thereof shall know it no more.* That his days are but the *length of a span, and in that narrow compass he walks in a shadow, disquieting himself to little or no purpose, and heaping up riches which he cannot tell who shall gather.* For thus much only is certain in the case, that though one's *substance be increased, and the glory of his house never so much exalted, yet he can carry nothing away with him when he dieth, neither shall his pomp follow him.*

Do adversities or injuries of any sort press us hard, want or disgrace, the treachery of false friends, or the malice of professed enemies, the mischiefs of open violence, or the secret stabs of slanderous and envenomed tongues? We are provided here with suitable applications; directed in poverty to that watchful care that *takes us up, and cherishes us, when even our father and mother forsake us*; set upon that *rock, which cannot be shook by any overflowings of ungodliness*; referred to that *Judge of hearts* who knows our innocence, and when men *hate us without a cause, and lay to our charge things that we know not, will awake and stand up to avenge our quarrel, and not suffer our enemies to triumph over us ungodly.*

Are we entangled in the toils of Satan, and assaulted by violent temptations to sin? If through our frailty or our folly we have provoked the Majesty of heaven to withdraw the cheering light of his countenance; in all attacks and combats with the adversary of souls, in all the bitter anguish of remorse, in all the anxious concern to recover that *lovingkindness which is better than life itself*, we are supplied with the best advice, the tenderest reflections, the most prevailing methods of endearment, the most zealous and most successful example to this purpose. And sure it was an act of mercy to the whole world that God permitted David to fall so grievously and be punished so severely; since this not only teaches us that the best men may fail, and do not stand out of the reach of danger and temptation, but makes both his sin and his sufferings, his prayers and his tears, an everlasting monument and pattern to all succeeding ages.

In a word, (for I must force myself to contract this point,) whether the precepts or the promises of God, his exhortations or his threatenings, whether praises or prayers employ us, there is no exigence of

^b Psalm ciii. 15, 16; xxxix. 6, 7.

^c xlix. 16, 17.

^k xxvii. 12.

^l xxxv.

our souls, no condition of person or fortune, no mercy we can desire, none that we would return thanks for, no posture of affairs in the church or in the state, of our friends or of our enemies, but these psalms would regulate our behaviour under them, and suggest seasonable supplications for them. Of so wondrous happy a composition are these divine poems, so instructive, so pleasurable, so entertaining while they teach, so improving while they delight, so roady, so effectual a cure to those pains and passions which they charm and assuage.

Of these excellencies the good and wise men that have gone before us declared a due sense, by constantly commending this book to men's private meditations, and allowing it a more than ordinary share in the public devotions of the church. Concerning both these uses I will add somewhat, and so conclude.

1. And first, for private meditation. The care taken in this respect was formerly so great, that the most and the meanest had a considerable part, and the men of better capacity seem to have had the whole of it perfectly by heart, insomuch that St. Chrysostom describes the labourer at his work, the good woman at her household affairs, nay even the young children, mixing such pious ejaculations in the intervals of their business and diversions. And happy were it, sure, if the memories of all people were so profitably stored, and the vacant spaces of their time so virtuously filled up. For it is the mind's peculiar excellence, that, as its thoughts are never weary, so neither can they be absolutely idle. Here then (instead of those polluted images which nurse up vice, and poison their sobriety and chastity) men might make a virtue of necessity, and in the midst of a laborious care to provide for themselves and family, might deceive their time and toil by making sweet music to God; might thus repair that want of leisure hours and more composed devotions which business will not suffer them to have. But that indeed which should most powerfully recommend such a practice is, that this is doing the work of heaven while upon earth. For a great part of what we know concerning that place of bliss and its glorious inhabitants is, that they live in perfect harmony and love, perpetually singing praises before the throne of God. And sure, if there be any sense of, any pantings after that happy state, we cannot but delight in joining with that blessed choir, in raising our hearts as high, and labouring to get such foretastes of their joys as our present distance and the frailties of mortal flesh and blood will now admit us to.

2. But then indeed do we approach nearest to those blissful regions, when, with united hearts and voices, we publicly set forth the praise of our Almighty Creator and most merciful Redeemer. And therefore these psalms have borne always a very considerable part in the divine worship both of the Jewish and the Christian church. That several of them were composed expressly for the service of the tabernacle and the temple is plain. And as well our Saviour himself, as the state of his church under the gospel, have so great an interest in them, that these prayers and praises and complaints continue very

applicable to the godly of all ages. And that men might in our manner of serving God the better imitate that consent of saints and angels above, that no tongue might lie idle, but all join in so necessary, so acceptable a work, the people, in present as well as primitive congregations, have been allowed their share too. Either by consort where music was customary, or by repeating the verses by turns where that advantage could not conveniently be had. All which, and going over the whole book of psalms in the course of every month, help to stir up one another's zeal to imprint and fasten these things in the memories of men, enable their devotions abroad to furnish proper matter for those at home, and enrich their mind with a treasure of pious remarks and reflections, to be drawn out for such uses as each person's temper disposes him to, or his private circumstances shall best direct.

But it must never be expected that the most innocent or most beneficial institutions should escape all censure and scruple. The malice of some and the weakness of others call every thing into question. For the conviction therefore of them who seek occasion of blame where there is none, and for the satisfaction of those who would be glad to find that in reality there is none, I will just mention some of the principal objections against our use of these psalms in the daily public service, and leave some short hints with you by way of answer, which may vindicate the church's practice in this matter.

1. Now the first objection I shall mention pretends the psalms to have been composed upon occasions peculiar to the times and circumstances of their respective authors, and therefore wholly impertinent and unfit for the use of other ages and persons. This is far from being the case with a great number of them, which are equally fit and edifying for all places and seasons. And even for the rest, which it may seem most to concern, the defence is obvious from those intimations already given, that Christ and his church are so often referred to, so clearly predicted there, which renders them of general concernment to all Christians. And sure such an incommunicable property cannot belong to David in those psalms whereof himself was the author, since our blessed Lord hath so often used and interpreted, and his apostles argued from, many passages spoken as in David's own person. For the truth and force whereof, I appeal to our Saviour's own words upon the cross, and St. Peter and St. Paul's discourses on his resurrection—the one in Jerusalem, the other at Antioch, but both addressed to people versed in these scriptures, and not to be imposed upon by false applications.

2. It hath been a second exception, that however a private use of them may, where every man's discretion will guide him to that which is proper for his own purpose, yet a public use of those, and all these psalms, as they offer themselves promiscuously, cannot be convenient; because, supposing all to join, the afflicted give thanks, the prosperous mourn, and the easy complain. Now the answer to this is very easy.

^m Matt. xxvii. 46; Psalm xxii. 1; Luke xxiii. 46; Psalm xxxi. 5; Acts ii. 25-31; xiii. 35, 36, 37.

For men, then met, are looked on as one body, and as having a common concern in all the providences of God, not only that are now, but that ever were to his servants and people. But waving this, is not the mercy of God over every one of his works? and hath not the most distressed creature breathing received more than he deserves or hath been sufficiently thankful for? Are not our very sufferings for excellent ends, and may not the calamities of our outward greatly promote the happiness of our inward man? Do not even these then demand our thanks; thanks for being afflicted no sooner, no heavier; thanks for the comforts our afflictions have still left us; nay, thanks for being afflicted here with a design to prevent our being tormented hereafter? And therefore praise cannot be uncomely in any mouth or at any time. Then for the prosperous; if he hath no infelicities (but who is there so perfectly happy as to have none?) of his own to deplore, yet is he not bound to remember and lament those of his brethren, to express a sympathy for his fellow-members of Christ's mystical body, and to reckon himself a sufferer in them and with them? And once more, will not the recollection of other, especially good men's adversities, very naturally excite in us great gratitude for that tenderness and longsuffering of God, which hath preserved and laid so much less upon us, who have (it is probable) deserved to endure so very much more?

3. A third cavil hath been taken from the curses and imprecations to be met with there, as not agreeable to Christian charity and the temper of him who hath commanded us to *love them that hate us*, and *pray for them that despitefully use us and persecute us*. Be it allowed, that higher degrees of charity and meekness are now required than under the law; and that some things excusable in the Jews or in David are not a pattern, nor so much as pardonable for Christians: yet ought it to be considered, (1.) that no temporal judgments are final, but capable of becoming blessings in order to a future state; and therefore, to people incorrigible by gentler means, as it may be mercy in God to inflict such, so it may be no breach of charity in us to pray that he would deal with them in such manner as may effectually reclaim them from their wickedness, and prevent their farther hardening in sin and their everlasting damnation. (2.) That it is always lawful (with due resignation to God's will) to ask our own safety and deliverance from trouble; and if matters are brought to such pass that these cannot be compassed any other way, we may, in order to it, pray for the humbling and confusion of our enemies. (3.) That David is to be looked upon in the quality both of a prophet and an eminent type of Christ, and thus his enemies and God's are inseparable and the same. Thus those forms of imprecation, as they stand in our translation, are rather predictions of the vengeance God resolved to take on the blasphemers and persecutors of our Lord and his gospel; and so ought to be read with thankful acknowledgments of that power and goodness and truth which appeared in their respective accomplishments, and so wonderfully vindicated his own cause. And (lastly) we may consider both David's enemies and

Christ's as figures of our spiritual enemies, the prince and powers of darkness; and sure we need be under no scruple or restraint against the tempter and his hellish accomplices that so earnestly labour our eternal ruin. Some or all of these reasons may, I hope, suffice to satisfy men in the use of these psalms; and that it is not the composer's fault, but their own, if they feel from hence provocations to such a frame of mind as is in any degree inconsistent with the duties of forgiveness and truly Christian charity.

4. Once more, some object, that, not having attained to David's piety, they dare not make his professions of *having reaped their souls, and kept them low—of praising God seven times a day—studying his law all the day long—loving his commandments above gold and precious stones, or thousands of gold and silver, and the like.* Now these men ought to consider, that in such passages David is our pattern, and expresses perfections necessary for us to be put in mind of; such as we all should aspire after, and be ashamed and very sorry if we have not yet attained to.

In a word, let us make it our great aim, both in public and in private, to repeat David's words with David's affection, to tune our souls to his harp, and enter into his spiritual joys and griefs. For, as we have no right to his comforts without his repentance, so neither do we *make melody to the Lord* unless we *make it in our hearts.* It is the hand that touches the instrument, not the instrument itself, that recommends the composition; and we must have pure hearts, abstracted spirits, heavenly desires, and inflamed devotion, if we hope to make good consort with saints upon earth, or to have a place in the glorified choir of heaven.

THE FIFTH SUNDAY AFTER THE EPIPHANY.

THE GOSPEL. St. Matth. xiii. 24.

According to our Lord's interpretation of the parable, ver. 37, &c.

24 *The kingdom of heaven is likened unto a man which sowed good seed in his field:* 24. The state of the gospel and of them that live under it in the present world is this: Christ propagates in all parts of the earth a doctrine of truth and purity, the fruits whereof are men of sound principles and holy livesⁿ.

25 *But while men slept, his enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat, and went his way.* 25. But the devil, a constant enemy to all goodness, (taking advantage from the negligence of some and the infirmities of the best men,) corrupts this doctrine, and obstructs the success of it by introducing false and pernicious principles, the product whereof are heretics and schismatics, and men of wicked and scandalous lives^o.

ⁿ See ver. 37, 38.

^o See ver. 38, 39, 41.

26 *But when the blade was sprung up, and brought forth fruit, then appeared the tares also.*

27 *So the servants of the householder came and said unto him, Sir, didst not thou sow good seed in thy field? from whence then hath it tares?*
plainly discern the difference between them, and know that these men, whatever they pretend, do not follow the instructions of Christ, but of the devil.

28 *He said unto them, An enemy hath done this. The servants said unto him, Wilt thou then that we go and gather them up?*

God that it should be done by utterly exterminating such wicked men, and sending them out of the world in methods of blood and barbarous executions.

29 *But he said, Nay; lest while ye gather up the tares, ye root up also the wheat with them.*

would prove greater to the good than any which the suffering evil men to continue among them at present can produce :

30 *Let both grow together until the harvest : and in the time of harvest I will say to the reapers, Gather ye together first the tares, and bind them in bundles to burn them : but gather the wheat into my barn.*
the evil and the good, when both shall be brought to judgment. And then the wicked shall be cast into a furnace of fire : there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth : thus shall they be punished for all the mischief done and the scandal given by them in this world. Then shall the righteous also shine forth, as the sun, in the kingdom of their Father. Thus shall they be rewarded for that patience and meekness and constancy, which the evil principles and evil deeds of those wicked are permitted to exercise with many hard trials in the present condition of things.

26. This was carried on so subtly and secretly as not presently to be perceived ; but in process of time the thing discovered itself.

27. For good men, by comparing the tenets and practices of these men with the doctrines of the gospel, may be to remedy this mischief, it is not the will of

28. Meanwhile, how zealous soever their concern may be to remedy this mischief, it is not the will of

29. This God disallows, both because the inconveniences of such a proceeding

30. And because the punishment of such is reserved for the end of the world ; at which time God will command his angels to sever the evil and the good, when both shall be brought to judgment. And then the wicked shall be cast into a furnace of fire : there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth : thus shall they be punished for all the mischief done and the scandal given by them in this world. Then shall the righteous also shine forth, as the sun, in the kingdom of their Father. Thus shall they be rewarded for that patience and meekness and constancy, which the evil principles and evil deeds of those wicked are permitted to exercise with many hard trials in the present condition of things.

COMMENT.

Our blessed Saviour had, in a former parable of the sower, signified the different successes of this world, proportioned to the different dispositions of its hearers. This concerned the seedtime, the very act of planting and propagating the gospel. But here he, in another parable, denotes a disadvantage, to which even the best seed and the best soil would be liable after it was sown, from tares being sown upon it. Of which figure in regard himself hath condescended to be his own interpreter, all we have left to do on this occasion is to observe

the substance and main scope of the parable, which plainly amounts to thus much :

That it is the pleasure of God to suffer a mixture of bad with good men during the state of his church in the present world ; that, notwithstanding the many inconveniences which may and do arise from such a mixture, he doth not think fit, either by judgments from his own hand immediately, or by authorizing men to be the ministers of his vengeance upon one another, utterly to extirpate all corruption of doctrine and manners. That there are very wise and good reasons for his forbearance, particularly that it is grounded partly upon such as regard the good men, with whom those wicked are mixed, and partly upon such as concern those wicked themselves.

Now my design is, first, to consider the reasons of this proceeding, so far as the parable hath directed us to them ; and then to conclude with such inferences as this subject will naturally suggest to us.

1. I begin with the reasons for continuing a mixture of bad men during the present state of Christ's church in this world. And of them, with the former sort, such as have respect to the good men with whom those bad are mixed. For that their benefit is consulted by such forbearance is manifest from the eight and nine and twentieth verses. Where, upon the servants proffering their pains to *go and gather up these tares*, the master of the field is represented disallowing the forwardness of their zeal, as over-officious, highly unseasonable, and of very dangerous consequence. *He said, Nay ; lest while ye gather up the tares, ye root up also the wheat with them.* And that this prohibition is of service to good men will, I conceive, sufficiently appear from the three following considerations :

1. First, look upon the matter as propounded in this parable, where the servants were offered for the instruments of rooting out these tares, and the danger of good men perishing together with the wicked soon manifests itself. Let us suppose the most favourable circumstances that such a dispensation can possibly bear. Allow these purgers of the field to have no other views but the honour of God, the peace and security of the church, the undisturbed exercise and advancement of piety and virtue : admit this zeal of theirs to be, not only untainted with secular interest and ambition, but perfectly void of rashness and heat, tempered with all imaginable discretion, proceeding with the most scrupulous caution, executing vengeance upon no single person without the best information mankind are capable of : yet even in such a case (and such a case, however possible in supposition, I doubt was never true in fact) the *wheat* cannot be safe, because such gatherers are never able to make a perfect distinction between the tares and it : that is, they cannot know exactly who are truly good and who bad men. And the reason is, because that wherein the essential difference between these two sorts consists lies *deeper than any human eye can penetrate*, even in the heart, the will, and the intentions.

If then the tares they endeavour to root out be heresy and corrupt doctrine, men can enter no farther into the merits of this cause than

outward profession will guide them. They may know who lists himself of such a party or espouses such an opinion; but they cannot discover who embraces the truth out of temporal interest, and who out of a sincere conviction of the mind; who refuse it from a spirit of obstinacy, and who from want of capacity or better instruction. And yet the honest mistaken man is, in a judgment of equity, pitiable at least; and the dissembled temporizing orthodox of very small account in God's esteem.

Put case again, this tare be vice and immorality; men can see and animadvert upon the openly dissolute and scandalous. But can they pursue the demure and secret sinners through all the intricate mazes of their hypocrisy? Can they unlock their closets, draw the curtains of their polluted beds, or descry the filthiness of their thoughts? Can they distinguish the vainglorious from the sincere, or separate between the gaudy outside of a laboured formality and the native lustre of an inward purity? Both these men may affect the eye alike, and yet *one is a whitened sepulchre, full of rottenness and dead men's bones*, the other a living temple of the Holy Ghost: the one hath the power of godliness, the other only the form; and, for want of the power, is as errand a tare as if he had not even the form. But still that tare may be mistaken for good corn, and so may this good corn be sometimes too for tares. So that an absolute separation is not possible to be made, and consequently neither safe to be trusted with nor fit to be attempted by men. No, this must be reserved to that God who alone can discern between reality and disguise; for they who are not able to do so can never *gather up* all the tares: to that God who sees and makes allowance for men's particular circumstances; the unaffectedness of their ignorance; the violence of their temptations; the suddenness of their surprises; the uprightness of their intentions; the simplicity of their hearts; their want of opportunities to know or to do better. All these no man can understand perfectly, and therefore no man can make just abatements for them. And without such abatements, the security of many honest and good people cannot be effectually provided for. For upon any other terms there is no remedy, but they who go about to *gather out the tares will root up also a great deal of wheat with them*.

2. Secondly, to this difficulty on the part of the gatherers may be added another no less insuperable one, from the posture and condition of these tares themselves, whose roots are so intangled with those of the good corn that there is no disengaging them; no drawing out the one without tearing up the other at the same time. My meaning is, that the affairs of men in this life are so intricate and perplexed, and the interests of the good and bad so nicely mingled, so mutually interwoven, that it is absolutely impossible, according to the present and ordinary circumstances of the case, for any alteration to happen to the fortunes of the one which shall not very sensibly affect the other also. The same titles in law, the same advantages in trade, the same hazards of person, are shared between them. The same vessel at sea, the same family on land, the same shop in the city, contains both. So

that it is not possible, according to any human consideration, for storms or fire or pestilence, or any other common calamity, to sever between them.

Not only so, but even in those disasters that are more particular and personal, the wicked will have some partners or relations or friends, who must suffer in them or with them or for them. Nay, suffer so much the more sensibly, as themselves are better men; because such are proportionably more tender and compassionate. For virtue, above all things, softens our hearts and fills them with kind and merciful resentments. Religion is the highest improvement of humanity and good nature; and none who is a Christian indeed can see the sufferings even of them who deserve most to suffer, without impression and concern. So great a mercy is it to the righteous that the wicked are spared at present. Because it saves them a multitude of tragical and afflicting spectacles, which, if God should take swift vengeance upon sinners, would render life a most uncomfortable thing, and turn the world into a scene of grief and horror, of misery and blood.

From hence we see how impossible it is for even that Providence, which can distinguish exactly between the good and the bad, to punish the bad without the good; except we suppose a change to be made in the condition of all human affairs, and in the very nature of goodness itself. For as the mutual relations and concerns of mankind are ordered, the evil cannot suffer without involving the good, and drawing these into a part of the punishment by suffering together with them: and as the temper of religion now stands, the good will at least be touched with a feeling of their miseries, and so must needs suffer and be afflicted for them.

3. But thirdly. Could the *tares* be entirely *gathered up* without danger and detriment to the corn, in either of the forementioned respects; yet it is the part of a provident householder to let them stand; because, by so doing, the price and goodness of the wheat is raised. Which is as much as to say, that a mixture of bad men ministers many occasions of virtue to the good, and gives them great advantages of exerting themselves, without such a mixture never to be had: and therefore it is an eminent instance of the divine wisdom and kindness both, still to continue it. The deformity of some vices, the folly and unprofitableness of others, the vanity of lust and sensual pleasures, the treachery and disappointment of all worldly expectations, would be but coldly represented in words, if we had not living examples to furnish undeniable demonstration of these things, sad monuments daily before our eyes to bring the truth of the matter home to our very senses. But when all this is done, we are then powerfully excited to decline ourselves what we cannot but pity or despise or detest in others. The severer dispensations of justice upon the wicked, in the natural, the moral, the providential consequences of a profligate conversation, though exercised but sparingly at present, and neither upon all that deserve them nor in all the extremity that

some may conceive reasonable, are yet frequent and sharp enough to daunt the daring, to settle the wavering, to raise the satisfactions of a resolved good man, and to convince as many as consider them that God thinks himself concerned to take notice of men's actions; and that at some time, and in some way or other, such as himself sees most expedient, he will not fail to execute a visible vengeance upon every one who hardens his face and walks in defiance to him and his laws.

It is confessed indeed, *these are they that turn the world upside down*; the instruments of all the mischief and confusion we see and lament in it: but then it must be confessed withal, that, were it not for that rage and villainy, that deceit and disorder of theirs, some virtues would be absolutely lost, and others could not but be eclipsed. Were there no sons of treachery and malice, no violent oppressors, no injurious or slanderers, what would become of those noble graces which vindicate the innocent and deliver the poor from him that is too strong for him? Where should the *recompensing evil to no man*, where the *blessing them that without any cause curse and rail at us*, where the *forgiving of wrongs and loving of enemies*, find a place? So then, as is commonly observed in circulation of trade, that were there no prodigals, little encouragement would be left for the frugal and industrious; in like manner it may be said in morality too, that every virtue is powerfully excited and most successfully promoted by some opposite vice.

But especially, to name one instance more only, Christian patience and fortitude are a plain evidence of this point. For it is to the refractory and perverse, the barbarous and bloody, that the brightest crowns in heaven are in some measure owing. Had not those tares been suffered, not only to stand with, but even to top it over and shed their venom upon the wheat, the truth could never have triumphed in her *noble army of martyrs*. Nay, which is the highest we can possibly go, the redemption of mankind by the death of the blessed Jesus, and that most perfect pattern of all goodness, is a consequence of this mixture. For how could a person so excellent be treated so ignominiously, how that inimitable meekness have shone so gloriously, had not God permitted the treachery of an apostle to betray him, the subornation of Pharisees to testify falsely against him, the cowardice of a timor-serving judge to condemn him, and the unrelenting cruelty of an inflamed rabble to crucify him? Nothing more can be needful to shew of what importance it is that God should think fit to forbear very bad men; or how much virtue is beholding to vice for its lustre and force; since even the cruelty and malice of them who wish it worst awaken its powers, render the examples of it more illustrious; and so, in fact and in event, exalt and beautify, while their intention and endeavour is to darken and suppress it.

Thus much may suffice to be spoken of the reasons for God's permitting a mixture of tares in this common-field of the world, so far as the safety and advantage of the wheat is consulted by such forbear-

ance; that is, the benefit of those good men among whom the wicked have dealings and conversation. I now proceed to a second sort of reasons, such as relate to the wicked themselves.

And of these my subject leads me to two, than which no more are necessary to be mentioned; because the one illustrates the goodness, the other the justice of God in this dispensation.

1. First. The goodness of God is very manifest, in that by this method sinners have longer time allowed them to recollect and to reform in. For it is an observation of considerable weight in the present argument, that the case of this mystical differs greatly from that of the natural growth. There, whatsoever is once a vicious and unprofitable seed can never change its quality; but here these tares may, by the grace of God and their own better consideration, ennoble their kind, and, after standing long among the wheat, at last become wheat themselves. That this is an effect intended by all delays of punishment, St. Peter plainly declares, when rendering this account of our Lord's deferring to come to judgment, *'The Lord (says he) is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.'* And that this is the improvement proper to be made of all such delays is no less evident from St. Paul, who in his Epistle to the Romans rebukes the Jews for *'despising the riches of God's goodness and forbearance and longsuffering; and represents their not knowing, that is, not considering, that the goodness of God leads men to repentance, as a mark of their hardness and impenitent heart.'*

The longer such people are spared, the more leisure and opportunities they have for amendment. The examples of others, the various disposals of Providence, the signal mercies and severities of it, are so many fresh arguments continually offering themselves and stirring up new thoughts and serious reflections. And every judgment that stops short of utter extirpation is an awakening call, an expedient for cherishing the principles of a spiritual life. The lopping off luxuriant branches, and cutting the stock down low, as well as digging about and dunging the tree, are methods of pruning and cultivating; but plucking up by the roots and casting into the fire cannot become a master of the vineyard, till all other experiments have been made use of to no purpose. And since it would ill agree with the character of a wise and good, as well as a just and holy God, to give his creatures over to destruction before they have proved themselves absolutely incurable, what ground can we find for complaint that he allows the very worst and most profligate such abundant proofs of his tenderness; that if they perish at last it may appear to all the world this comes to pass, not because he wanted any inclination to pity and to spare them, but purely from the obstinate abuse of repeated means and mercies, and because they could never be prevailed upon to spare and to pity themselves? And this illustrates the goodness of God.

2. The second reason, which vindicates his justice, is, that God hath

appointed a season in all respects proper, and hath reserved to himself the work of separating these tares from the wheat: which therefore need not, must not be anticipated. This is the purport of the thirtieth verse, *Let both grow together until the harvest: and in the time of harvest I will say to the reapers, Gather ye together first the tares, and bind them in bundles to burn them: but gather the wheat into my barn.* The true import of which passage, without all controversy, is, that God hath fixed a day in which he will judge the world; a day, whose proceedings shall make a distinction between the righteous and the wicked; a perfect distinction, and such as the condition of this world cannot admit: that the punishment of the damned, intimated by binding and burning the tares, will be irreversible and extreme, such as can leave the good no room for envying or grudging the now-boasted prosperity of the ungodly: that the distribution of final rewards and punishments is therefore a royalty peculiar to God, what he lets no other into; that the time of that distribution is in a future state; that such a time will in the course of things as certainly come, as in nature a harvest follows a seedtime; and that the reason why it is not yet come is because matters are not yet ripe for it. So that upon the whole, so long as forbearance can be any way of service either to the persons on whom it is immediately exercised, or to any others by their influence or example, so long it is continued. But when these uses cease, and mercy hath done its part, then vengeance shall succeed. The good corn shall be parted from the refuse, and each assigned to a place worthy of it. The one laid up as a valuable treasure in the granary of this heavenly Householder; the other cast out as a nuisance no longer to be endured, and burnt in indignation as unquenchable as the fire into which it is cast. All which considered, men have reason to be contented with God's own methods and his own time; and should not throw out rash censures of Providence, nor desire to hasten a justice that will take care to do itself right; will do it effectually in its proper season, to the entire satisfaction of every good man, and the eternal confusion of all obstinate and incorrigible sinners.

I come now, in the last place, to conclude with a few of those many inferences which the subject in hand very naturally suggests to us.

1. And first. From what went before concerning this mixture of tares with the wheat, it is exceeding evident, that the viciousness of men's lives can be no sufficient ground for separating from their communion. And this condemns that popular declaiming, which draws away weak minds, and pretends to justify the breaking off from a sound established church, because (say they who ought not to say it) the lives of them who abide by its worship and discipline are evil. Were it our purpose to recriminate, the field is spacious enough. But truths of this kind are really of no weight. We are not, nor ought any man to be, so weak as not to see, that what our Saviour declares shall never be prevented in this world, what he represents as the case of the Christian church in general, can never be a justification for disavowing and disturbing any national church of Christians in

particular. Let them, before they presume to go away, prove that our doctrines give countenance to, that we do not declare against, lament and condemn, any practices that reflect upon our profession: let them next, if they can, instance in any religious persuasion, in any age, which the lives of none of its professors did ever cast a blemish upon; and till they can do so, let them think a little how unwarily they act, who presume to lay the ground of a separation in an argument which, if worth any thing, and pursued through all its consequences, must as effectually dispose the men that use it to renounce the Christian, nay even that too which is commonly called natural religion itself.

2. Secondly. It follows likewise from hence, that the best men are not to expect so discriminating a Providence as, when the wicked suffer, should always screen them from suffering too. For God hath put this world into a regular course of causes and effects. He hath knit men together in greater and less societies; the cement of this union is secured by mutual alliances, promiscuous dealings, and united interests. All this, no doubt, is for their mighty benefit. But then they must take the bad with the good. For the same reasons will cause the inconveniences as well as the advantages of people thus combined, to be of vast extent and speedy communication. They must be so, except we suppose the stated order of nature to be broke in upon at every turn; which it cannot become a wise governor to do. Nor is there any occasion he should do it in favour of every good man. It is enough that this be done sometimes, upon very extraordinary emergencies; and that when this is not done, God makes such men amends for what they suffer by being in ill company. The former hath been often, the latter most certainly will be done. But one great work of the last day of account would be superseded, if holy persons should endure nothing here, for which they are to expect a recompense hereafter.

3. Thirdly. As the justice of Providence is not obliged to prevent the evil of suffering in good men, so neither is the holiness of Providence obliged to prevent the evil of sin in bad men. It is enough that (as the son of Sirach expresses it) God *hath left man in the hand of his own counsel*; that he does not compel any one to do ill, nay, that he is ready to assist them in doing well. And that, when they will do what they ought not, in despite of the checks of natural conscience, the light of reason and religion, and the importunate solicitations of the Holy Spirit; he then gets himself glory of their disobedience, defeats the malice of their purposes, and brings that good out of evil which the actors never intended. And this he hath been shewn to do by making vice itself subservient to virtue, and rendering the most unjust and barbarous persecutions fruitful in patterns of heroic piety and the brightest crowns of righteousness.

4. Fourthly. As little can it be inferred from hence, that this prohibition to gather out the tares makes it unlawful for the Christian

magistrate to punish heinous malefactors with death. For they are not punished thus as offenders purely against God and religion, but against the state, and the laws of the country to which they belong. Now this is a privilege and a right common to all civil societies, to give fresh sanction to the laws of God, to preserve their own properties and constitutions, and to inflict what penalties are necessary upon such as boldly invade them. And therefore he who suffers capitally in such cases remains as liable to the judgment of God for the transgression of the divine law, as if the laws of men had never taken cognizance of him at all.

5. Lastly. Hence it will be no hard matter to discern what is our own duty in the case before us. Namely, that in regard the tares are sown, will come up, and must stand, our business should be to keep from being corrupted by a mixture which we cannot altogether avoid. To provide and execute wholesome laws, which may put some convenient check at least to this pernicious growth. To endeavour the infusing into these weeds a more generous nature, and the bringing men off from their evil courses by good advice and pious examples. Particularly to imitate the kind compassion of this heavenly Householder, and by all soft and gentle means, all courteous and engaging behaviour, to win such over to a better sense. Above all, not to fret at his forbearance, or be envious at evil-doers, but wait his good pleasure for unravelling the secrets of his own mysterious providence: in full assurance that a day is coming, when all mankind shall see abundant reason to join in that celestial song of Moses and the Lamb: *Great and marvellous are thy works, O Lord God Almighty; just and true are thy ways, O king of saints.*



THE SIXTH SUNDAY AFTER THE EPIPHANY.

THE COLLECT.

^a O God, whose blessed Son was manifested that he might destroy the works of the devil, and make us the sons of God, and heirs of eternal life; Grant us, we beseech thee, that, having this hope, we may purify ourselves, even as he is pure; that, when he shall appear again with power and great glory, we may be made like unto him in his eternal and glorious kingdom; where with thee, O Father, and thee, O Holy Ghost, he liveth and reigneth, ever one God, world without end: Amen.

^a Rev. xv. 3.

^a 1 John iii. 8; 1 John i. 12, 13; Galat. iv. 4, 5, 6; 1 John iii. 2, 3; Matt. xxiv. 30.

THE EPISTLE. 1 John iii. 1.

1 *Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God: therefore the world knoweth us not, because it knew him not.*

all such to the title, the hopes, and the inheritance of sons. Which dignity notwithstanding, we are not to wonder if the men of the world be ill affected towards us, who neither are rightly acquainted with him to whom we are thus related, nor treated him better in whom this relation is founded.

2 *Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is.*

is certain, that in the next life we shall be exalted to a greater resemblance of him; for we shall then have a nearer and more distinct knowledge of him, whom to be like is the perfection of our happiness.

3 *And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure.*

4 *Whosoever committeth sin transgresseth also the law: for sin is the transgression of the law.*

that he acts contrary to him, and to the law given us to walk by. For all sin is a breach of some law of God.

5 *And ye know that he was manifested to take away our sins; and in him is no sin.*

and dominion, as well as the guilt and punishment of sin; and therefore he was not himself under either, but

6 *Whosoever abideth in him sinneth not: whosoever sinneth hath not seen him, neither known him.*

will permit: and they who are not so, but allow themselves in sin, make vain boasts of their light and knowledge.

7 *Little children, let no man deceive you: he that doeth righteousness is righteous, even as he is righteous.*

of this kind. For he only is a good man and the child of God who leads a good life, and imitates Christ's holiness.

8 *He that committeth sin is of the devil; for the devil sinneth from the beginning. For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil.*

1. Consider, I beseech you, how exceeding great kindness God bears to good men, and how manifest a proof of it he hath given in admitting

all such to the title, the hopes, and the inheritance of sons. Which dignity notwithstanding, we are not to wonder if the men of the world be ill affected towards us, who neither are rightly acquainted with him to whom we are thus related, nor treated him better in whom this relation is founded.

2. Meanwhile, this relation implies and assures to us many valuable advantages, greater than we can yet understand. But thus much

is certain, that in the next life we shall be exalted to a greater resemblance of him; for we shall then have a nearer and more distinct knowledge of him, whom to be like is the perfection of our happiness.

3. And this, if it be indeed esteemed and expected as

our happiness, will put us upon being as like him at present as may be in holiness of life.

4. But a man that sins deliberately and wilfully is so far from being like him,

that he acts contrary to him, and to the law given us to walk by. For all sin is a breach of some law of God.

5. Now the very design of his coming into the world was to take away the power

and dominion, as well as the guilt and punishment of sin; and therefore he was not himself under either, but absolutely pure and sinless.

6. All then who maintain this relation entire are so too, as far as human frailties

will permit: and they who are not so, but allow themselves in sin, make vain boasts of their light and knowledge.

7. Do not then suffer yourselves to be imposed upon by any false pretences

of this kind. For he only is a good man and the child of God who leads a good life, and imitates Christ's holiness.

8. The man that indulges himself in any sin is of another family, a child and imitator of the devil. For the devil hath been con-

tinually employed in wickedness ever since the world began. This he first practised himself, this he first drew mankind into, and this he is now continually suggesting and promoting. All which is so directly opposite to God and Christ, that the Son of God came into the world on purpose to counterwork and overthrow the devil, by destroying his works. And such are all sorts of sin.

COMMENT.

After what manner all true Christians are the sons of God, how great an honour this relation is, what glorious hopes it inspires, what noble effects it ought in reason to produce upon our minds and lives, and what inestimable privileges it derives upon us even at present, are points which have been in some measure considered in a former discourse. But how far not only that did, but even the most accurate representation of these privileges possible to be made by man, must needs fall short of the dignity of this subject, St. John acquaints us here. For he declareth that, though already possessed of this relation, we are so far from as yet attaining to the possession, as not to have just notions and a perfect understanding of the full extent of it, or all the advantages it entitles us to. *^cBeloved, now are we the sons of God: and it doth not yet appear what we shall be.* But though the whole of this do not appear, yet a part does. And that so much as may suffice for the purposes which the *love* that bestowed it upon us intended it at present to serve. Enough to excite us to or encourage us in a vigorous pursuit of those virtues and graces, which may become the character of persons so honourably distinguished here, and render them *meet to be partakers* of the glories reserved for them hereafter. *^dBut we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is.* And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure.

To this passage my present thoughts shall be confined: and the use I design to make of it is threefold:

1. First. I will endeavour to make you sensible, that the not having a distinct view and adequate understanding of the happiness provided for good men in the world to come, is no reasonable objection against those hopes and that dependence upon it, which the Scripture propounds as a most powerful motive to a holy life.

2. Secondly. I shall consider that part of this happiness which we already do know, described by *^ebeing like to Christ at his appearance, and seeing him as he is.*

3. Thirdly. I shall shew that the belief and expectation of this happiness is, in the very nature of the thing, a proper and strong inducement to piety and virtue. For *^fevery man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure.*

1. I begin with the first. That the not having a distinct view and adequate understanding of the happiness provided for good men in

the world to come is no reasonable objection against those hopes and that dependence upon it which the Scripture propounds to us as a most powerful motive to a holy life. That no such full and distinct view can at present be had, is confessed by St. John in the *passage* now before us; who makes no difficulty to declare, that though we be already the *sons of God*, it does *not yet appear what we shall be*. In agreement wherunto, St. Paul describes our *walking* in this world to be by *faith, not by sight*; and at the very instant that he calls upon us to make the *things eternal* our end and aim, he says that these are *things not seen*. In the mean while, the things thus hidden from us are not left destitute of their proper evidence, for such he asserts *faith* to be. A principle fitted for operations so powerful, that persons walking by it may, even in death itself, *be confident*, and with great *willingness* put off this *body*, in the strength of that assured expectation which they are possessed with of another and better state to succeed, when *they shall be absent from the body, and present with the Lord*.

These two or three texts, singled out from a great many of like importance, but especially the examples of holy men, set down in the eleventh to the Hebrews, may suffice to shew what effects have actually been produced in others, and are still expected in us, from our notices of a future happiness, however at present imperfect and obscure. My design is in this particular to prove that such effects are very reasonable, by observing somewhat very briefly concerning the causes of such obscurity; the nature of that principle to which those effects are ascribed; and its sufficiency for that purpose, notwithstanding the darkness of the matter propounded to it.

1. The causes of this obscurity proceed, partly from the condition of the things themselves, and partly from that of our own nature. For in regard the clearness of any object depends upon a just proportion and agreement with the faculty by which it is to be perceived, where that object is either very remote or very disproportionate the perception must needs be dark and confused. Now such is the case of this happiness we are treating of. It stands at a mighty distance, and cannot be attained in the life we now lead: it requires many alterations to be made in our persons, in order to qualify us for the enjoyment of it: it does not manifest itself to us by any light of its own, nor is to be discovered by such collections or inferences, as reason and our natural powers are wont to make, concerning matters near at hand, familiar with and commensurate to them: it is the free gift of God, the product of his will and bounty to his own creatures; and therefore the ingredients of which it consists, as well as the conditions upon which it shall be bestowed, being entirely at his own disposal, can only be learnt by such declarations as he in mercy hath been pleased to afford for our support and encouragement. Some presages and expectations of a future happiness after death have indeed been entertained by the best and wisest men of all ages. But

for a firm persuasion and certain account of this matter we are beholding to *Jesus Christ*, who is therefore most truly said to have *brought life and immortality to light through the Gospel*. So that they who undertake to determine or explain this matter farther than this light guides them have no firm ground to go upon, but talk altogether in the dark. And yet it is necessary to observe, that even in the Gospel itself the declarations made there are not in all points suited to the nature of the thing, but expressed in terms full of condescension. They are industriously accommodated to the capacities of men dwelling in bodies of flesh, conversing with gross and material objects, and moved by sensible impressions. In short, God speaks to us about these matters in such language as we may understand, rather than in such as is intended to describe things strictly as they are. Yet so as at once to work upon our affections and desires, and to prevent our resting so far upon those representations, as from thence to form low and carnal apprehensions of a blessing which stoops to us under such ideas, only because we are not perfect and abstracted enough to receive it under better.

This is the ground of all those metaphors and parables which figure out to us the joys of the blessed, by *eating and drinking at Christ's table*, by *sumptuous banquets*, by *marriage feasts*, by *fertile pastures*, *beautiful dwellings*, *magnificent cities*, whose sun never sets and whose light is sevenfold, by *thrones*, and all the ensigns of honour and majesty peculiar to princes upon earth. And yet we are sufficiently forewarned against taking those passages in their most obvious and literal meaning, when told, that the *children of the resurrection neither marry nor are given in marriage, neither hunger nor thirst*; and consequently, that there will be an end of all such gratifications of sense, when both the necessities that require them and the appetites that pursue and recommend them to us shall be no more.

In the mean while, though it were an indignity to the bliss prepared for the saints in heaven, by conceiving of it just as these and some other like passages sound, to sink it down so low as the pleasures coveted by and confined to the meanest of our faculties; yet is there this use to be made of them, that we from hence are taught to conclude, that all the satisfaction which can possibly result from the greatest plenty, the highest honour, the most exquisite beauty, and every rational and truly manly pleasure, as much and more than the most sensual can enjoy or imagine or wish for, will be not only equalled, but vastly exceeded in the happiness of the next world. For the very great variety of comparisons and allusions made choice of to this purpose intimates that there is no sort of joy which can then be worthy of us, not any that we shall be capable of in that state, which will not then be indulged us in its utmost perfection; but all that we can love or like, delight and take comfort in, shall be present with us and possessed by us for evermore.

As therefore it is no reflection at all, either upon the truth, or upon

the excellence of those arts and sciences and wise designs which men value most and are best served and improved by, that children and people of the meanest capacities are not in a condition of making themselves masters of them; but that in order to their being so, ripeness of years and judgment, much thought, long exercise and painful study, are necessary preparations: so neither is it any diminution, but indeed a just and very high commendation of the bliss and glory reserved for the next world, that they are not fully and clearly to be known in a state where the wisest of mankind must, in regard of these matters, be content to *think and speak and understand as children*; where they that *know most know but in part*, and they that imagine they see clearest see only *through a glass darkly*. Were these things less excellent, we should be better able to discern and to describe them: but then, in proportion as they were more exactly to be comprehended, they would in their own nature be less worthy of our love. For God hath set bounds to the faculties of our mind, as well as to the organs of our sight; and in both cases made some objects, of which we have no just and adequate perception, not from the smallness, but the exceeding greatness, not from the darkness, but the too strong and dazzling light of the thing, we would be glad to see. We must therefore look upon the things not seen as the more desirable upon that very consideration. It is with these as with God himself; their glory is not to be approached by any man; not by any in the present condition, and while we carry those defects about us which the wisdom of him that made us hath thought fit for souls incumbered with flesh and blood. We must wait with patience for that happy change, which shall clear and take off the darkness of our glass, bring us nearer and acquaint us intimately well with those glories, which to have brought down to our capacity in the prospect here had been to abate our happiness in the enjoyment hereafter. And we have reason to be content with that little of them in comparison which may be seen at present; since they who murmur for want of more do in effect repine at being men; than which nothing can be more impious. They find fault that God designs to make them happier than they can ask or think, than which nothing can be more ungrateful and absurd. Especially if the little we do or may know be so wisely suited to our circumstances, that nothing needful either to our duty or our interest is wanting. And that such is the case in this matter I shall briefly endeavour to make plain by considering,

2. Secondly, the nature of that principle to which the Scriptures ascribe the effects that these glories are required to produce, and the sufficiency of it for that purpose. Now what this principle is, the Apostle hath informed us: for when speaking of this subject, he observes, *We in this life walk by faith, not by sight*: and the force of *faith* is declared by terming it *the evidence of things not seen*; that is, an assured expectation or a persuasion of what we so believe, which is as free from danger of deceit as if the thing itself were actually present, or given ready down in hand. And if this be the true account of faith, then it is plain, when future rewards are the object of it, there

are but two things requisite to qualify it for any the noblest effects upon us; (1.) that we be furnished with good grounds for the certainty, and (2.) that we be satisfied of the value and excellence, of the rewards we thus believe. For thus they are a reasonable motive to do and suffer for them all they were promised to support us under or excite us to. Now,

1. The certainty of those rewards is implied in the very notion of that faith whereof they are the object. For faith, strictly and properly taken, is an assent upon credible testimony; and religious or divine faith is an assent given to the testimony of God. Now this is credible in the highest degree; because, though other testimonies may be true, whatever is thus attested must needs be true. And therefore St. Paul could never have expressed himself in words more satisfactory and significant than he hath done upon this very occasion, when mentioning *eternal life* as that which *God, who cannot lie, hath promised*. The only difficulty, then, and single enquiry concerning this matter, is, whether the Scriptures which contain those promises are really the word of God. And that they are so, we have all the evidence that a point of this nature is capable of. More than any other such fact transmitted to posterity was ever able to produce in its own vindication: much more than men make no scruple to rest and venture their all upon, in other cases esteemed of the last importance: as much as is consistent with the reckoning faith a virtue, and rewarding it as an act of obedience and choice. And therefore, to persons satisfied that a future happiness of good men in another world is what the truth of God stands engaged for, it can be no reasonable objection, that the condition and circumstances of that happiness are not at present fully understood. Because the true ground of believing it is not any argument drawn from the nature of the thing itself, but from these short and very plain maxims, that whatsoever he declares, who neither can deceive nor be deceived, must needs be so; and whatsoever he hath promised and determined will surely be accomplished. That he who is faithful cannot deny himself by going back from his word; and he who is almighty must be able to perform abundantly above what we are able to hope or to conceive. That he, who in his infinite goodness revealed thus much to us, would have revealed more, had more been necessary to compass the proper end of this discovery. He only could inform us in this matter; and therefore, from his affording no larger and fuller measures of such knowledge, it is most rational to conclude, that his wisdom, which is also infinite, as it could best judge what was fittest, so it disposed this light as was fittest for our capacities and occasions.

2. In the mean while, this very inability of ours to conceive and fully comprehend the happiness of our future state, as it takes nothing off from the certainty, so does it help to assure us of the greatness and value of that happiness. It being with this as with the nature of God himself, that the perfection and excellence of the thing is chiefly

represented in negative terms; because, as hath been often said already, the positive description of so noble a bliss is at present too exalted a subject for our understandings. These, employing themselves upon things suitable to a state of frailty and mortality, and being acted upon by impressions of sense, are forced to judge of and do most easily apprehend those privileges by comparisons. Thus the importunity of our wants is so pressing, and the labour and anxiety for supplying them so perpetual a burden, that it could not but be a proper method of recommending heaven by saying, that the blessed above do neither *"hunger nor thirst any more.* The calamities that embitter our lives are so various, the passions that disorder and disquiet our minds so tumultuous and violent, that a deliverance from these is a mercy most sensible to men who groan under such burden and slavery; and therefore it may well make us in love with those regions of tranquillity, that there *"tears shall be wiped away from all eyes; and there shall be no more sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain; because the former things are passed away.* The possessions of this world are so slippery a tenure, and our own continuance in it so short and so uncertain, that it must needs affect us to consider how great a difference to our advantage there is in a *Per crown incorruptible; a treasure and inheritance that fadeth not away: "bags that wax not old: "true riches, which the rust corrupteth not, and the thief cannot approach: "a joy that no man taketh from us; "a continuing city, everlasting habitations; "and when the earthly house of this tabernacle, the body, shall be dissolved, a building of God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.* A new and better clothing for our souls, which outwears time itself, and *swallows up mortality in life.*

Now when the condition of glorified saints is in this manner represented to us, we are not from hence by any means to suppose that the utmost of their happiness consists in a mere state of ease and indolence. But, because the dangers and the miseries, the fears and frailties, the sorrows and sufferings of this present life are, in a greater or a less degree, the lot and burden common to all mankind, an entire deliverance from and standing clear out of the reach of these is a description that comes nearest home to the feeling of every man, and such as his own circumstances, when considered, teach him to make a true estimate of. By these alone we are secure of a state after death infinitely to be preferred before that of which we are apt to be now so inordinately fond. But the Scripture does not rest here. It mentions, as I have formerly observed, *"many ingredients of that bliss hereafter.* But none more comprehensive, none more desirable, than that which I have propounded for the subject of my

II. Second head; and is expressed by the Apostle in these words, *We know that when he shall appear we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is.* In speaking to which I shall very briefly enquire, (1.)

^a Rev. vii. 16. ^b Rev. xxi. 4. ^c 1 Cor. ix. 25. ^d 1 Pet. i. 4. ^e Luke xii. 33.

^f John xvi. 22. ^g Heb. xiii. 14; Luke xvi. 9, 11.

^h 2 Cor. v. 1, 4.

ⁱ Epistle for the Innocents' Day.

what is meant by *seeing God as he is*. (2.) How this gives us an assurance of being like him: and (3.) wherein that likeness, so far as at present we know of it, may be supposed to consist.

1. That the *seeing* of God implies very great bliss, no doubt can be made by any who recollect that good men are pronounced *blessed* upon the account that they shall *see* him, and that the punishment of ill men is summed up in their not being suffered to *see* him. But still, when we speak of seeing God, this is not meant of seeing with bodily eyes. For these can act only upon matter and bodily objects, and consequently God, who is a Spirit, is not to be seen this way. Which is so plain, that I could have hardly thought it worth while to mention it, had not some nice and speculative persons thought it worth theirs to dispute very solemnly about it. *Seeing*, no doubt, is in this case an action of the mind, and intended to denote all that knowledge, all that enjoyment, all that delight resulting from both, by which one intelligent spirit is capable of understanding and loving and admiring and taking pleasure in another. All which is very fitly represented by seeing; because this is of all our senses the most noble and refined, the most critical and exact, the most perfect and comprehensive, the most unwearied and inquisitive, the most desirable and delightful. And therefore than this there could not a fitter image be chosen to intimate to us the large and clear knowledge of God; the unconceivable pleasure of contemplating him, and the joy of loving and being loved by him: which this presence of his, and the sight of him *as he is*, lets all the blessed into and feasts them with for ever.

And here again, by *seeing God as he is*, we must not imagine a full and perfect comprehension of his nature and excellencies to be intended. For sure and easy to discern it is, that no finite understanding can extend itself to infinite knowledge; and therefore, how mightily soever our faculties may be enlarged in the next life, (and no doubt they will be mightily enlarged,) and how graciously soever God may then manifest himself to us, (as he will manifest himself very graciously,) yet since those additions exalt only but do not alter our nature, and these condescensions change not nor take off from his: we still are finite, he still infinite; and by necessary consequence too vast and too sublime, not for any human only, but for any created understanding, of whatsoever rank or quality, entirely to know, and in this sense of the phrase, to *see him as he is*.

Hereby then we are given to understand, that glorified spirits in heaven attain to a knowledge of God the most perfect that they can possibly receive, and quite different from the utmost they can attain to in their present state. Here they *see through a glass* which represents the lines and figure and complexion only; there they shall *see face to face*, shall, as with naked eye, contemplate the essence of this adorable Being, and have a direct and nearer view of those excellencies, which here they behold through another medium, and by reflection only. The creation and providence, the Scriptures and word

of God, these are the glasses that now shew him to us. And through those glasses we see but *darkly* neither: the original signifies an obscure form of speech²; the true import whereof is not expressed, but left to be gathered by study, and carrying much difficulty in it. Like the parables of the prophets and our blessed Saviour, or the types and figures of the old law; which the generality of them who heard and saw were far from apprehending the mysteries wrapped up in them. And thus, when this veil and these clouds of flesh and sense, these scales that hang now before our eyes, shall be done away, we shall see all things clearly, and be able to look steadfastly against a light, which, like that darted from heaven upon St. Paul, would, as matters are at present, even blind and strike us to the ground with the insupportable strength of its lustre. Hereby we are taught to expect a full degree of evidence, that will exclude all manner of doubt or dissatisfaction; as the highest certainty is that which comes from seeing with our own eyes. Hereby the most transporting joy that can be, as now those objects move and affect us more which are perceived by sight than by any other sense. Hereby in a word, all the advantage that our nature, when most exalted, can have to capacitate it for larger happiness, and all the happiness we can enjoy when fitted up for enjoyment, to gratify and fill all those capacities. And if the men on earth do, by long time and travel, from the imperfect discovery of some beloved truth, feel a satisfaction to which all the pleasures of the most indulgent epicure are as nothing; what can we think must be the joy, the gayety, the triumphs of those souls, who see in God the truth and excellences of all things, as in their common source and centre; who behold the *fair beauty of the Lord*, continually seeing all that is lovely, and loving all they see, and possessing all they love; and being wrought themselves into the most intimate union with the most desirable resemblance of the adorable perfections of him, who is thus in himself and to them *all in all*? For that is the next thing I promised to inquire into, the consequence of, or at least the happiness concomitant with this vision of God, implied in those words of St. John before us, *We know that we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is*.

The meaning of these may either be, that there is a necessity of our being made like God, in order to our attaining to such a sight of him in the next life as hath already been explained; or else, that the being admitted to such a sight of God will have this certain effect of drawing us to a nearer resemblance of him than it is possible for us at present to come up to. Concerning each of these I shall speak very briefly.

First. We may depend upon being like God hereafter, because he hath promised such a sight of himself to us as that likeness is a necessary preparation for. The wise man hath observed most truly, that *the corruptible body presses upon the soul, and this earthly tabernacle weigheth down the mind*, distracted with many thoughts. The know-

ledge men arrive to in this condition does, for the greatest part, depend upon sensible images; and we find it exceeding hard so to abstract our thoughts from matter, as to discourse with any accuracy of things which are not thus represented to our minds. And hence, as I took notice, it comes to pass that these things are chiefly known to us by negatives, separating from our idea of them some of those imperfections which we find and feel in others of a grosser substance, and aiming at some tolerable perception of them by figures and resemblances borrowed from such as are most familiar to us. To give us therefore a capacity of knowing God, our minds must be put into another frame, our faculties exalted, and the objects we contemplate imparted to us after a way different from what they now are. This we have ground to infer, from the condition of our souls at present, that they hereafter will see and understand after another manner, though we cannot determine precisely what particular manner that shall be.

And, as it is with the knowledge of these things, so we may rationally conclude it to be with regard to the relish of and satisfaction from them. To heighten this, it is requisite that those difficulties and laborious methods, those very slow and painful advances be removed, which now are such checks to our studies of this kind, and render them so dry and discouraging to the greater part of mankind. And this no doubt will be done by the putting off that *flesh and blood which cannot inherit the kingdom of God*; by that change which shall be wrought in our persons and our tempers, by being set at large from those necessities and appetites, frailties and passions, which now encumber and cramp up the mind. A freedom from these cannot but render the thoughts of spiritual objects more easy and more agreeable, give another taste and turn to our souls, refine our delights and desires, as well as our ideas. And since our likeness to God did at first consist in an intelligent and free spirit, the more this is improved, and the less it is clogged with the body, the more nearly we resemble him. And the nearer we resemble him, the more we shall be qualified to know and to love him. And thus it may be affirmed, that the *seeing God as he is* infers our *being like him* as an indispensable predisposition, such as all they who have not arrived to are under a natural disability of so seeing him. They are in the circumstances of dim eyes and sullied glasses; the former must be cleared and strengthened before they can sustain, the latter cleansed and polished before they can take in, the rays of so bright and beautiful an object.

2. The other, and, I think, more commonly received sense of the words now under consideration is, that the *seeing God as he is* will produce in us a likeness to the perfections we see. The foundation of all goodness is laid in right apprehensions of God. For mankind seem to have been all along pretty well agreed in this point, that to be like God is both our duty and our happiness. But then the different notions men have of God have led them into different ways of endeavouring after that likeness. And, representing God to themselves otherwise than he

is, they consequently framed themselves upon different models, and have invented false, and sometimes most extravagant and impious schemes of religion. This was the case of heathens heretofore, who, the better to countenance their own lewdness and excesses, imposed upon themselves and the world with a pretence of voluptuous, drunken, and lascivious deities. This is too much the case of Christians too, who indeed acknowledge nothing in God but what is truly excellent and good, and adore him as the source and sum of all excellence; yet, according to the difference of their complexion or customs, they attend so much more to, and often prefer one excellence so far above another, as that hereby is produced a great diversity both in opinion and practice. His justice, his power, his mercy, his holiness, are all confessed perfections; yet, because the due temperament of these is not duly understood, as one or other of them happens to be uppermost in our thoughts and more strongly to affect us, occasions are taken for such notions of God as set these attributes at variance, and do not only shew God as he is not, but dispose us to conform ourselves to that mistaken idea we have of him. Were the sanguine and the gay, the liberal and open, and the phlegmatic and melancholy, the man of rigour and preciseness, the fatalist and the morose, to be examined thoroughly, I make little doubt but their notions of Almighty God would be found at as wide a distance from each other as we may plainly see their humours and deportment to be. And all this probably from the selfsame cause, of *seeing God as he is not*, and judging of that imitation he requires by false systems of their own.

Again. Nothing can be more evident than that the will of man, though free in the choice of this or that particular object, is yet in the general determined to the choice of good. And when the thing chosen is not really such, it is because the man was cheated with a false appearance of good. But this is our misery, that we often mistake evil for good, or else prefer a less before a greater good. So that all our vices and moral defects are owing to want of knowledge or consideration, of care or of integrity in judging of our true happiness and the means proper to attain it. But now, in the next life, all things will be set in their true light, all the bribery and bias of sense and flesh will then be taken away, and we shall not only be enabled to understand, but inclined to approve and choose that which is best. We shall then, without any dividing our affections, discern God to be our chief, our only good, and a conformity to his imitable excellencies to be our perfect happiness. In short, we shall then do that which we here wish for in vain, see virtue in all its charms; of which, as an eminent philosopher hath well observed, could we behold the full lustre and beauty, it would, even in this frail and corrupt state, engage our hearts so powerfully as scarce to leave a possibility of deviating from it. And how noble, how wonderful, may we well imagine, will the improvement be of minds thus fixed upon one only amiable object, always contemplating with joy unspeakable, always admiring and loving, always

copying after and approaching to the sum of all perfection; and, to use in this sense the words of St. Paul, *“with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, by the Spirit of the Lord:—a glory constantly shining upon and communicating itself to them. Thus much may suffice to shew what certain connection there is between our seeing God as he is, and our being like him; and it leads us very naturally too to the*

3. Third inquiry proposed under this head, wherein that likeness to God will consist. Now the Scriptures, from whence alone we can safely take our measures in this matter, have, among other things relating to it, acquainted us that our bodies, when they die, shall be quickened again; that they are, as seed cast into the ground, to come up with vast improvement, and very different from the condition they lay down in. That they are *“sown in corruption, but raised in incorruption; sown in dishonour, but raised in glory; sown in weakness, but raised in power; sown natural bodies, but raised spiritual bodies. That ‘flesh and blood, as now it is, cannot inherit the kingdom of God; and therefore, to qualify us for that inheritance, this corruption must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality. And how this mighty alteration shall be effected we are likewise informed. For *“the Saviour the Lord Jesus Christ, at his coming from heaven, shall in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump, change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body, according to the mighty working, whereby he is able to subdue all things to himself. Thus we shall be like to Christ, as man, in the utmost perfection this part is capable of. And in the same respect we shall be like him as God too, so far as the being set above all the incumbrances and defects of these bodies we now carry about us can make us like him. ^bNo wants or infirmities, no importunity of appetite, no unevenness of passion, no hunger or thirst, no weariness or sleep, no pain or sorrow, no feebleness or decay, no sickness or old age, no dying any moreⁱ; but *“beauty for ashes, and joy for mourning, even the joy of our Lord,—a joy that we are very significantly said to enter into, because it is too vast to enter into us; a joy that could not be perfect if it were not immortal, and a crown therefore to be valued infinitely above any other, because incorruptible, and that fadeth not away.***

But as God himself is a Spirit, so the most desirable part of our likeness to him will be that of our souls. And these will be like him, in clear and unerring, in full and comprehensive knowledge, in *“seeing face to face, in knowing even as we are known. In perfect holiness; for there shall we ^lbehold God’s face in righteousness, there we shall not have spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing, but be unstained and without blemish: there every temptation and occasion of sin shall cease, no devil to seduce us, no vanities or pomps of the world to allure us, no ^mwarring of the spirit against the flesh, and the flesh against the spirit. But a peace that passeth all understanding, even the *“peace of God ruling in**

^d 2 Cor. iii. 18.

^e 1 Cor. xv. 42, 43, 44.

^f Ver. 50, 53.

^g 1 Cor. xv. 52;

Phil. iii. 21.

^h Rev. vii. 16, 17.

ⁱ Luke xx. 36.

^k 1 Cor. xiii. 12.

^l Psalm xvii. 15; Ephes. v. 27.

^m Phil. iv. 7.

ⁿ Coloss. iii. 15.

our hearts without control. Like him in fervent and unbounded charity, the love of God and of our brethren ; without any other object to divert the former, without any emulation or envy or grudging to give check to the latter. Where all shall be of one heart and of one soul, and nothing shall be seen or heard or felt but *righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Ghost*. Such is the likeness which, we know, shall belong to us, the enlargement of our understandings, the rectitude of our wills, the purity and harmony of our affections. A state so perfect, so very like to God as no other ever was or can be ; not even that of man in his primitive innocence, for then it was indeed possible for him not to sin, but in this it shall not be so much as possible for him to sin. But, though we cannot be so happy here, yet some approaches toward it we may and must, and, if we believe and expect it in good earnest, we certainly shall make even now. For that is my

III. Third and last head, that the *knowing we shall be like God, and see him as he is*, cannot, in the very nature of the thing, but be a proper and very powerful inducement to piety and virtue. *Every one*, says St. Johu, *that hath this hope in him purifieth himself even as he is pure*. The *purifying himself as he is pure* is to be understood like those commands of *being holy as God is holy, and perfect and merciful, as our heavenly Father is merciful and perfect*. All which are intended, not of an equality, but of a likeness only, and that such a likeness as our present condition will admit. Not of a state altogether sinless, but such degrees of goodness as may be attained to, such as imports an allowance for necessary frailties and inseparable defects, and a gracious acceptance of sincere endeavours instead of absolute perfection.

Such is the purity mentioned here as a natural consequence of this glorious hope. For *every one that hath this hope in him* can have it no otherwise than upon the terms which the promises of God have thought fit to limit it by. Since therefore the *seeing God is a blessing peculiar to the pure in heart* ; since it is declared that *without holiness no man shall see the Lord* ; that *the unrighteous, fornicators, idolaters, adulterers, offeminate, abusers of themselves with mankind, thieves, drunkards, covetous, revilers, extortioners, shall none of them inherit the kingdom of God*, it is plain that this purity and holiness here are indispensable conditions of obtaining happiness hereafter ; and they who indulge themselves in any such abominations deceive their own souls with false expectations, and do not properly *hope*, but impudently presume.

The truth is, God in his wisdom hath so ordered the matter, so admirably contrived our nature and our duty, that virtue and happiness are one and the same, differing but in the circumstances and several prospects we consider and view them under. The good begin their heaven upon earth, and finish there what was imperfect here. The more they mortify and master their sensual appetites, purge off their corruptions, raise their affections up to things above, improve

o Rom. xvi. 17.

p 1 Pet. i. 15 ; Matt. v. 48 ; Luke vi. 36.

q Matt. v. 8.

r Heb. xii. 14.

s 1 Cor. vi. 9, 10.

their minds by the study of religion, acquaint themselves with God by frequent prayer and heavenly meditation, wean themselves from and get above the world, the more they are spiritualized, and, as the apostle expresses it, *made meet to be partakers of the inheritance with the saints in light*. They have rendered the joys of the next life more familiar to their thoughts, have already learned to taste, and are in a better disposition to enjoy the full delight they shall bring. As he, who is already versed in the language and laws and customs of a country, is better fitted to converse in and improve the pleasures and advantages of it than any raw and unexperienced person, who goes to settle there without such previous skill or preparation. And therefore those men may at least be judged to have qualified themselves for higher degrees of bliss and glory, who have, even before they came thither, already had their hearts, their *treasure*, and *their conversation in heaven*.

I know some men think those arguments liable to objection which undertake to prove, that were a wicked man received into heaven he could not think himself happy, where every thing would be found so opposite to his temper and sense of happiness. Now this is an assertion founded on that general maxim, that all pleasure results from the agreeableness of the object, and its being suited to the faculty or palate of the party enjoying it. And have we any warrant to pronounce this here a case exempted from so general a rule? They who argue thus allow, with the objectors, that heaven must be perfect happiness to all who inhabit there. The objectors, I hope, allow too, that none but good men can inhabit there. And it should be remembered, that they who put the case are sensible they suppose a condition impossible in fact. The design of this argument therefore is only to shew, that the day of recompence will find us exactly as death left us; that if we have not killed the *man of sin*, death will not do it for us; and that there is so exact a congruity between our duty and our reward, that they do not differ in nature and kind, but in degree, and greater and less perfection. Consequently, that the labouring to be like God here is the only expedient we know for being like him hereafter.

I will not deny but some, who have led ill lives, may, upon their repentance at last, be suddenly received to mercy; nor will I venture to say such is uncovenanted mercy. But when even this is done, there must be a change of affections, (the very notion of repentance implies thus much;) and certainly no man who considers this matter with seriousness will venture his all upon it. The hazards are so many, the uncertainty so great, the encouragements so slender, the examples for it so few, and, when closely examined, so short of the point, that I should think that man much more ingenuous and of a piece that lives ill, and absolutely disavows any thoughts of a life to come, than him who professes to entertain such a hope, and yet leaves himself nothing but one such desperato push for it. To conclude all, (for I have been carried to an unusual length,) nothing can ever be more absurd than the principles of a Christian and the life of a Pagan, than to call our-

selves the sons of God, and all the while be servants to the devil; to hope for Christ's coming again, and to do the works he came before on purpose to destroy; to hope to be like God hereafter, and to make ourselves as unlike him as may be in the meanwhile. To pretend we wait and pant for that likeness as the complete felicity of human nature, and wilfully to obstruct our own happiness in such measures of it as may be compassed here, and are the only rational evidences of desiring the fulness of it hereafter. These things can never stand together, never approve us to the judgment of God or man. No. Let us remember the end and temper of the Christian faith, the design of our great and precious promises, and the purpose of our blessed Lord's causing himself and his gospel to shine upon us. Let our thoughts, our words, our every action shew we have duly considered that memorable text of St. Paul, so nearly allied to the offices of this day: *The grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world; looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ; who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works.*

The only application I shall make of this discourse is earnestly to conjure every Christian, that he would very seriously, very frequently meditate upon these things. For the more he does so, the more familiar they will be to him, the belief of them more firm and lively, and the value of them better understood. All which how necessary and how useful it is, will easily appear by this one observation. That no man ever yet did an evil thing knowingly and deliberately, but with a proposal of some good from it. Now the imposing upon men with false opinions and false estimates of the ends they propound to themselves, is the very foundation of all the wickedness in the world. And consequently, the most effectual course to prevent or give a check to wickedness, is the setting men right in their judgments of the good and evil consequences of good and bad actions. Were this persuasion firmly rooted in their hearts, were it, as it ought to be, always uppermost in their thoughts, that a future state certainly awaits us, that the glories and blisses of that state, even by what we do or may know of them already, are infinitely to be preferred before all this world can give us; and that there are besides many and great pleasures, yet hidden from our eyes, unutterable, unconceivable, both for their worth and number; can it be supposed that men, who in earnest believe, and actually remember, and duly weigh these things, could ever be seduced so easily, as we find they are, into practices which the Scripture declares the enjoyment of these blessings was never intended for? No, it is impossible. Men must lay aside all pretence to reason if they can act at this rate. The fact is far otherwise. God promises future and unseen advantages as motives to virtue,—the

devil baits with such as are present and sensible indeed, but in no degree so valuable, as allurements to sin. Now these latter could never prevail above the former, were it not that men under temptation are wanting to themselves, either in the vigour of their faith, or in the justness of their computation, or in urging upon their consciences the necessity of the condition. That is, they do not sufficiently think and convince themselves of such a state, but being out of sight it is out of mind too. And for the benefit of these I designed my first head. Or else they do not reckon the happiness of the next world to be so incomparably above all that they are flattered with in this; which error the second head may help a little to correct. For this would rectify men's notions, and shew that, to *see God as he is*, and to *be like him*, are not such dry and tasteless things as they so commonly happen to be thought; and, because not better understood, are so often put, not only in competition with, but put behind the pleasures of sin and sense. Or, lastly, they delude themselves with groundless imaginations that, notwithstanding their sins, they may come to heaven at last, and for the disabusing such, my third head was necessary. So excellent a preservative hath St. John here furnished against temptation, so impenetrable a shield, able to repel all the fiery darts of the wicked, would we but weigh and remember, and, by continual dwelling upon it, render that present to our minds which cannot yet be so to our sight and experience. In a word, the more our thoughts are employed upon heaven, and the deeper they plunge into the vast ocean of eternity, the more we shall answer our character of God's children, the nearer we shall approach to him here by purifying ourselves in the strength of this hope, even as he is pure; and the more certain we are to be like him hereafter in his glorious kingdom. Which he, of his infinite mercy, grant we may, for Jesus Christ his sake. Amen.

THE SIXTH SUNDAY AFTER THE EPIPHANY.

THE GOSPEL. St. Matt. xxiv. 23.

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| <p>23 <i>Then if any man shall say unto you, Lo, here is Christ, or there; believe it not.</i></p> <p>24 <i>For there shall arise false Christs, and false prophets, and shall shew great signs and wonders; insomuch that, if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect.</i></p> <p>25 <i>Behold, I have told you before.</i></p> | <p>23, 24, 25. About the time of Jerusalem's final overthrow, many seducers will set up, each pretending to be the Messiah, that eminent Deliverer of the Jewish nation, so long foretold and expected^a. And these will prevail by the help of such lying wonders as God for the sins of men will permit to be done by them; so that many shall be deceived, and none but the steadfast</p> |
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^a 2 Thess. ii.

Christians be able to hold out against them. But to fortify such it is that I give this timely warning of these men and their impostures.

26 *Wherefore if they shall say unto you, Behold, he is in the desert; go not forth: behold, he is in the secret chambers; believe it not.* 26, 27, 28. Be not therefore led away by any vain promises of such a Deliverer to save you in this or that place of security within or without the city, for the coming of Christ in vengeance upon the Jews shall be sudden, swift, and terrible as a flash of lightning.

27 *For as the lightning cometh out of the east, and shineth even unto the west; so shall also the coming of the Son of man be.* coming of Christ in vengeance upon the Jews shall be sudden, swift, and terrible as a flash of lightning.

28 *For wheresoever the carcass is, there will the eagles be gathered together.* And the Jews, who are sentenced to death, shall in every quarter be destroyed, as if the Roman armies, whose ensign is the eagle, had the quality of that bird, so sagacious and greedy of prey, that dead bodies even at vast distance cannot escape them.

29 *Immediately after the tribulation of those days shall the sun be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars shall fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens shall be shaken:* 29, 30, 31. [See paraphrase on Luke xxi. 25, &c., in the Gospel for Second Sunday in Advent.]

30 *And then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven: and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory.*

31 *And he shall send his angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they shall gather together his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other.*

COMMENT.

THE substance of this scripture is, in effect, the same with that already treated of in the Gospel for the Second Sunday in Advent. There is therefore no occasion for enlarging any farther, either in the description or the proof of a general judgment. The terrors of that day are set forth here by St. Matthew in terms of near affinity with those in St. Luke. And that such predictions, even in their literal and most dreadful signification, shall then be strictly verified, St. Peter acquaints us, when declaring that *'the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and all the works that are therein shall be burnt up.* In all which, to prevent our taking shelter in any metaphors or imaginary hyperboles, he draws this inference in the words next following: *'Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought*

we to be in all holy conversation and godliness, looking for and hasting unto the coming of the day of God, wherein the heavens being on fire shall be dissolved, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat?

My discourse upon the Epistle for this day having carried me beyond the usual bounds, all I design here is to make some farther improvement of the subject in hand by a few practical considerations, which the time would not permit me to mention when handling it before.

I. And first, we shall do well upon this occasion to observe the great wisdom and goodness of our blessed Master, in the manner made choice of for foretelling his last coming. For by drawing the terrors of it so black, he hath taken the most probable course to awaken men's consciences, and put them upon shaking off spiritual security and sloth. And from the representations given of it, as a thing certain in itself and uncertain in the time, he hath cut off all wicked excuses for unthinking negligence and dangerous delays. Had those tremendous circumstances been omitted, the impressions upon our minds must in all reason have proved less powerful. And had its distance been punctually determined, men would have been apt to bear but very cold regard to an event which, though never so sure, yet, they had the comfort to know, was still removed a very great way from them. But nothing can be strong enough to scatter this spiritual lethargy, and quicken us into serious piety and effectual preparation for a judgment, upon the issue whereof our all must turn at last, and we be fixed in woe or bliss by it, if the certainty, the horror, and the suddenness of such a judgment will not. Sure we know it is, and terrible beyond all imagination, and very nigh at hand it may be, for ought we do or can know. Nay, far off, we are certain, it cannot be as it regards our own death. The condition whereof will in nothing differ from that posture of soul in which the great day of account will find us. What manner of persons then ought we to be indeed! how holy, how circumspect!—we, who call ourselves Christians, and profess, as such, most firmly to believe this coming of our Lord as a fundamental article of our most holy religion! St. Paul alleges in the Jews' behalf, that *had they known, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory*; and yet if, that ignorance of theirs notwithstanding, God poured out his indignation upon that people in circumstances so dismal that the ears of all that hear it tingle, and the very reading their story, even at this distance, chills and curdles all our blood; of how much sorer punishment shall we be thought worthy, who have so severe an example before our eyes, and yet take no warning by it! we, who profess to worship and be servants to Jesus, and yet in works disbonour and do despite to him! we, who acknowledge his glories and call him the Son of God, but, as much as in us lies, crucify and again expose him to contempt! Is not this to call down upon our own heads the utmost torments that day can inflict? Is it not to treasure up to ourselves wrath against the season of wrath, and to render that gospel, given to preserve and fit us for heaven, an

occasion of our so much juster damnation, and of sinking us so much deeper into hell? All the abused means of grace, all the neglected opportunities of amendment, even these admonitions, will fly in our faces, and upbraid the obdurate and improvident. And they who have had all done that could be done to them may well call upon the mountains to fall on them, and the hills to cover them, when they shall sink under the load of a double sentence, and be condemned, not only out of God's, but out of their own mouths.

2. Secondly. Hence we may learn how mean an opinion is due to this world and the things of it. It hath been well observed by philosophers, that no object of short continuance and subject to corruption can possibly be worthy the desires of a reasonable and immortal soul. And no argument is more capable of inspiring true nobleness of mind than those Christian revelations which so positively threaten the utter destruction of this whole material frame. When not this drossy earth alone, but even those purer celestial bodies, the source of light and comfort to wretched mortals, shall undergo the general conflagration, does not this argue, that what excellencies soever we may fancy in them, yet he who gave them being, and can be under no mistakes concerning them, sees nothing there so valuable as should incline him to spare them from ruin and dissolution?

But besides that unalterable decree that hath doomed these things to cease in themselves, there is another no less unavoidable, which brings them under a necessity of ceasing to us. For how continually do we feel them perish in the using! how often slip through our fingers, and leave us at once bereaved of a possession we fondly thought fixed and certain, and astonished which way we came to be so! Supposing them, yet further, to escape the common methods of decoiving us in that point too, yet how short is our stay with them, if they were never so firmly disposed to stay with us! Death, it is beyond all doubt, must make an entire separation: and this is in such swift, such constant motion toward us, that every one hath so much loss behind to enjoy the world in, as I have now been employing time to prepare him for the leaving it.

And who that is wise would place his affections and happiness in that which must forsake him one day, which may do it this very day? in that which every moment cuts off a part from, which often makes itself wings, and flies away from him, and which he himself is flying from as fast as time can carry him,—flying from it at the very instant that he pursues and caresses and settles his heart upon it? How vain are such fugitive objects in comparison of a *certain and enduring substance*! how miserably infatuated those unthinking creatures who allow such trifles, such empty bubbles, to overbalance a *treasure in heaven, a crown incorruptible, and that fadeth not away for ever*! Oh that men were wise, that they would understand this, that they would consider their latter end!

3. Thirdly. From the two foregoing reflections it is easy to discern the reasonableness of those virtues which are usually thought so extremely hard of digestion, liberal charity to the poor, and suffering

for a good conscience when God calls us to it. The abridging ourselves even of superfluous expenses and pleasures, but more of the common comforts and supplies of human life, and especially the giving up all, even that life itself, for the sake of religion, are, by the carnal, the vain, the worldly minded (that is, in truth, by much the greater part of mankind), looked upon as most extravagant instances of zeal, and, to speak tenderly, a pious madness. But, what absurdity soever flesh and sense may apprehend in this, the gospel sets the matter in a quite different light; and all the hardship that assaults us in it is merely from a forgetfulness of our condition in the present, and of our prospects and hopes in the next world.

1. Suppose, as to the former of these cases, the same command laid upon each of us as on the rich young man in the gospel; *Go, sell that thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven.* This may at first sound like a hard saying; but if we will sit down and weigh it nicely, what, in truth, does it amount to more than this, that we should do what every considering man would desire, and esteem himself happy in a fit opportunity to do, to make a virtue of necessity, and part with that by choice which we must otherwise part with by constraint? that we would freely give back to Christ what he first gave us, what is not in our power always to keep; and for which, if this be done, he will give somewhat in exchange, better, and not liable ever to be taken away? Were these earthly possessions absolutely at our own will, the joys of heaven should infinitely outweigh them. But when the question is not whether we will hold them fast, but in what manner we will quit them; whether a fire or a tempest, deceit or violence, shall wrest them from us; or whether we will convert them to generous and holy uses: whether a profuse heir shall squander them away in riot and luxury and folly; or whether we will profit ourselves of them by feeding the hungry and clothing the naked members of our common head: to dispute this is to question whether good or evil, loss or improvement, ought to be chosen. For this is a sort of noble avarice, thus to put money out to interest, and with the perishing dross of this world to purchase an everlasting settlement in the next.

2. Nor is the case very different with regard to suffering for religion: since here too the whole turns upon this, whether we will dedicate to God a life exposed to accidents innumerable and perpetual decay; and so, by a free-will offering, make that parting with the world a martyrdom, which must be a death however; or whether we choose to prolong a life which every moment may put an end to, at the expense of a polluted conscience and everlasting pains: whether we will die like Christians, and enter upon certain happiness to day; or whether we will run the hazard of being unspeakably and eternally miserable, by taking up with a bare possibility (for it is but a possibility) of living till to-morrow.

But, God be thanked, this in our age is seldom the case. And therefore I have a further design in vindicating the equity of commands which oblige even when matters are come to an extremity.

It is to put you in mind, how justly those men are condemned to misery hereafter, who refuse to be happy upon much easier terms. For if it were wisdom even to leave all and follow Christ, how senseless, how ungrateful is it not to allow him part of our abundance, and give to piety what, if withheld, would only minister unto vanity and sin! If even dying for him who hath already died for us cannot in strictest reason be declined, how wretched, how wilful must their condemnation be, who will not be persuaded to live to him, and devote their bodies and souls a holy sacrifice, acceptable, and zealous in good works!

Let us, my brethren, consider the glorious hope that is set before us, of being *like him*, and *seeing him as he is*: and let this effectually prevail with us *to purify ourselves even as he is pure*; as knowing very well that such a resemblance to him in this present world is the only possible way of attaining to be *made like him when he shall appear, in his eternal and glorious kingdom: where with thee, O Father, and thee, O Holy Ghost, he liveth and reigneth ever one God world without end. Amen.*

*The Sunday called Septuagesima, or the third Sunday
before Lent.*

THE COLLECT.

O LORD, we beseech thee favourably to hear the prayers of thy people, that we, who are justly punished for our offences, may be mercifully delivered by thy goodness; for the glory of thy name, through Jesus Christ our Saviour, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

THE EPISTLE. 1 Cor. ix. 24.

24 *Know ye not that they which run in a race run all, but one receiveth the prize? So run, that ye may obtain.* 24. The zeal I urge upon you, and express in my own practice, is no more than what ye Corinthians have frequent instances of upon much slenderer encouragements. For in the Isthmian games, celebrated with you, all the racers observe the rules prescribed them, and exert their utmost vigour, though of all these but one gets what all aim at. Let these men be your pattern, and do you run your Christian race with an eagerness that strives to be foremost, and would not be outdone by any engaged in the same course.

25 *And every man that striveth for the mastery is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a corruptible crown; but we an incorruptible.* 25. Again, those who contend in these games, at wrestling and cuffing, submit to discipline, debar themselves many liberties, and undergo great and long hardships to prepare them for the combat. And if they are content to do and suffer so much for a garland of boughs that quickly withers, ought we to decline some abridgments and self-denials who expect to be rewarded with a crown that fadeth not away?

26 *I therefore so run, not as uncertainly; so fight I, not as one that beateth the air:* 26. This is it which invigorates me; I know the course I make, and keep my goal in view, like those Grecian runners. Nor do I only brandish my arms in the air, and act imaginary conflicts;

27 *But I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection: lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway.* 27. But, like those wrestlers and cuffers, fight in very good earnest with my adversaries, this body of mine, its appetites and passions, and subdue them by mortification and strict discipline; lest otherwise I, who (like the herald in those games) proclaim the terms and the rewards to others, should at length, through sloth or irregular behaviour, lose all, and have the prize given at last against myself.

COMMENT.

The better to discern our Apostle's true scope in the passage now before us, we shall do well to begin our meditations upon it with observing the occasion which introduced this argument, and the propriety of those allusions wheroin the force of it consists.

1. For the occasion. First, this seems to have been given by these Corinthians having consulted St. Paul about some points of Christian liberty, wherein he sets himself to resolve and direct them from the beginning of the seventh chapter. Among others, that of eating meats sacrificed to idols is the most celebrated case. Of this practice, however innocent, when considered abstractedly, he advises a restraint: not from a principle of duty and private conscience, as a thing necessary in itself, or hurtful to persons rightly apprised of the matter, but upon considerations of prudence and charity, and so far affecting the conscience of Christians united in one body, that they are obliged to forbear whatsoever is apt to wound and offend their weak brethren. The better to reconcile these Corinthians to such acts of self-denial as they might think too rigorous to be imposed, with regard to things confessedly lawful in their own nature, he backs his former arguments by mentioning in this chapter several concessions, which he in strictness was not bound, but yet content to make, for the greater credit and recommendation of his doctrine, and for the sake of such advantages and rewards as he knew to be an

abundant compensation for all he could do or suffer in so glorious a cause. This drew him on to another topic, which would strengthen the force of his example by their own; and from the instances they daily saw, of men among themselves submitting to a great deal more, where the benefits they aimed at from thence were in no degree so valuable, to incite their zeal, and persuade them to think nothing too much, when the salvation of their own and their fellow Christians' souls was the recompense promised and aspired after.

2. To render his representation of this matter as moving and lively as might be, the Apostle chooses to express himself in terms exceeding proper for the persons to whom he wrote. It was with them, among other parts of Greece, that those games so renowned in story were celebrated. No honour was more eagerly coveted than that of excelling in those public exercises; one of which was racing, another compounded of wrestling and cuffing. In order to both these, a long preparation of set diet, abstinence from some pleasures, and several hardships were prescribed and undergone; and in the course and combat itself much sweat and toil, many hazards, sharp conflicts, and sore wounds and bruises, were to be expected. And yet all these were submitted to with incredible alacrity and resolution. But for what? for an empty name, for a crown of leaves; a prize that was withering and worthless; a prize contended for by many, but to be won by one; and yet courted as industriously, as painfully, as if each could, nay the more so because all, it was known, could not, obtain it; but still each flattered himself that he should be the single happy man to whom the glory of the field should be adjudged.

Since therefore it was a thing so common, so creditable among the people of Corinth, to exert themselves so vigorously upon so very poor, so very uncertain prospects, why should they decline the like diligence and zeal, where the prize they aim at is so much nobler and surer? Why think it hard to obey the rules and contain themselves within the limits marked out for their Christian course? Why not follow the pattern of their great Apostle by keeping the goal in view, by striving with all their might to be foremost in this spiritual race, by fighting, like him, in very good earnest and with some violence, bringing and keeping under an adversary as dangerous and difficult to be subdued as any they could possibly encounter in the Isthmian games; *even that body, those sensual appetites and passions, which St. Paul himself found it needful to treat so roughly, lest the Master of the exercise, and Judge of the prize, should at last reject him as unworthy to be crowned for any undue indulgences to his own inclinations, or for irregularities or sloth in a matter of such vast importance?

My endeavour upon this occasion must be to quicken men in the pursuit of their heavenly reward. And that (1.) by enforcing the Apostle's argument, which represents the excellency of it: and (2.) by recommending the methods he both practised and prescribed for the

obtaining of it. Under each of which heads I shall follow the pattern and comparison here before us; and from the very great industry employed about matters of less moment, endeavour to expose the folly and absurdity of being careless and indifferent in those of infinitely greater.

The motives taken from the Apostle's discourse here may be two: the value of the crown, and the possibility of obtaining it. And a little reflection upon each might suffice for the answering his purpose, did men but bring along with them a disposition to let any arguments in this cause have their full force upon them.

(1.) The comparison here lies between one crown and another; both looked upon as an ample recompense for the pains taken to obtain them. But with this difference, that, in reality, the value of the one is imaginary, and depends upon common estimation only; that of the other is intrinsic and substantial; and this commonly rated as much lower as the former is higher than it deserves to be. And that, as upon other accounts, so particularly, because, admitting (in compliance with the mistaken notions of the world) that each is a good, yet when taken at the very best, it is evident the one can be but a short and perishing, whereas the other is a fixed and lasting good: the one a *corruptible*, the other an *incorruptible* crown.

Of the former, the corruptible sort, are plainly all those advantages of the present world for which mankind so eagerly contend. They are fickle and fugitive; not only allayed by infinite abatements, which check our delights and disturb our enjoyment while we continue in possession of them; not only exposed to infinite accidents, which seldom suffer that possession to be quiet, and are perpetually conspiring to deprive us of them: but, like those garlands alluded to by St. Paul which wither of themselves, they are in their own nature fading, and such as it is not possible for the utmost art and care to preserve.

To spend time in proving this by descending to particulars is needless, when experience and common sense have done it to our hands. For I appeal to any man alive, whether this be not the case of all those most envied privileges and conveniences, wherein men are at so much trouble to excel one another. Whether the honour and applause acquired by the noblest and most hazardous achievements be not like that of the Olympic games; the subject of discourse and admiration for a while, but eclipsed by the next fortunate gainer of the prize, and shortly after neglected and forgotten. Whether they who sacrifice all to pleasure do not feel that this is lost by indulging; that to render it exquisite is the ready way to shorten it; and that every excess naturally destroys and turns it into pain. And lastly, whether the wise man have not most emphatically said of riches, that *they make themselves wings and fly away*; since used they cannot be without diminishing, and if not used, they are just good for nothing.

These are the prizes for which we see so much clutter and struggle in the world; that men think all the expense and hardships of long instruction and severe education in youth, all the toil and danger of a ripe and vigorous age, laborious days and restless nights, compass-

ings of sea and land, the caprices of courts, the fatigues of camps, the trial of every element and climate; in a word, ease and safety and health, and peace of mind, and life, and too often conscience and soul itself, wisely sacrificed to and laid out upon. Things which have indeed their comforts and conveniences, when sought and used in due place and proportion; but when pursued and loved inordinately, they destroy the very purposes they should serve. They are therefore most improper to be made the chief aim and end of living, and altogether unworthy even a small part of that which the generality of people are content to do and suffer for them.

And yet I will venture to say on this occasion, it were still more tolerable, if only the things already mentioned engaged our affections and endeavours to so violent a degree. But, to the still greater reproach of mankind, the folly extends farther: and frequent instances are to be found, where no pains or time or cost or danger is grudged for things perfectly frivolous, manifestly superfluous. To inflame a passion fitter to be checked and subdued; or to carry on a humour, as unaccountable and extravagant as the trouble we are at to sooth it; or to gratify a curiosity as fruitless as it was hard to be contented. So absolute a dominion do even the most trifling objects gain over us, when we let our appetites loose upon the world, and are governed in the estimates we make of them not by judgment, but by inclination.

(2.) Still there is one discouragement behind, which, added to the rest, should, it might reasonably be imagined, damp the vehemence of these pursuits. It is not the difficulty only, but the great uncertainty of compassing the prize they aim at. For thus the numberless disappointments of men's expectations demonstrate that it is. And thus our own reason will tell us it must needs be; where the advantage aimed at hath many seekers, where there is not enough in the thing sought to satisfy all; where, of those pretenders, the gain of one must be the loss of another; and consequently, where every candidate finds it necessary for his interest to outstrip or otherwise hinder every other body from making good their point, in order to securing and carrying his own.

Such is the condition even of the best of those things which we can suppose the *corruptible crown* in this scripture capable of being applied to. The riches, the honours, and the pleasures of this life: the happiness and rewards of another, manifestly intended by the *incorruptible crown*, are what some of my former discourses have rendered needless to endeavour, and their inconceivable excellence makes it impossible to give a full or worthy representation of. Let it suffice therefore at present to observe, that the apostle sets these in direct opposition to, and that they are in every particular already touched upon just the reverse of the other. A crown indeed; as that denotes the highest honour, the greatest affluence, the firmest security: the only crown, whose splendour does not deceive with false ideas; as having no weight of cares to make it burdensome, no dangers to allay its glory; but all bright, and massive, and stable.

This crown, besides its own value, is the more worth our striving for, because not, like all others, peculiar to some one, exclusive of the rest who contend for and aspire after it; but capable of being attained by every one that seeks it; sufficient to answer, nay infinitely to exceed, the largest wishes and expectations of them all; and so far from lessening the fruition to ourselves by having partners in the bliss, that, as no single person's endeavours shall suffer disappointment who seeks it regularly, so the more zealously each labours to promote the happiness of his brethren, the more effectually he establishes and the larger addition he thereby makes to his own. And this is a happiness not only exquisite in degree, and in its nature pure and satisfactory and truly excellent, but for its duration everlasting, always growing, always fresh; liable to no interruption, no abatement, no decay; a joy that no man can, a joy that God who gives it never will take from us.

Supposing therefore, that the enjoyments of this world really had—as, alas! they are very far from having—all that we fondly fancy to be in them; yet even so, it is plain, this ought to have the preference in our esteem and endeavours. And it is not easy to think of a more powerful incitement to quicken our pursuits after heavenly things, than the putting us in mind how we usually behave ourselves when we have earthly advantages in view. For what excuse can be found for that folly which overlooks and elights a treasure certainly attainable, real and perfect, and ever enduring; and lays out the whole of our time and pains upon shadows and bubbles, things in comparison empty and imaginary, often sought in vain, deceitful when found, not worth our keeping when we have them, and not possible to be kept long though we would never so fain?

Would men but allow themselves to think at all, and to act as becomes their character, they must needs be made sensible what difference there is between these two objects of their desires and labours. Such men, I mean, as St. Paul was heretofore, and I ought to presume myself now treating with; Christians, who steadfastly believe the gospel, and therefore can be under no reasonable doubt concerning either the certainty or the excellency of the prize, which God hath prepared for them that love and seek it in the manner he hath directed. And what that matter is we shall find no great difficulty to learn, if we will but attend to the methods the apostle here prescribes, and declares himself to have practised upon this occasion. Which therefore I proposed for my second head of discourse.

Now first, by comparing the Christian's duty to a *race*, the apostle no doubt intended to insinuate, what vigour first, what regularity next, what perseverance lastly is expected from us. The crown here aimed at is like those of the Olympic games in this respect, that it is bestowed in the quality of a reward; a distinction to them who have signalized themselves by performing the known conditions of obtaining it: and a reward too, that supposes all who seek it to understand it a compensation sufficient for all the toil and hardship such conditions are known to engage them in. In this persuasion is founded the en-

couragement to our undertaking the course. A persuasion, that would naturally banish indifference and carelessness by the glorious prospect of the end we have in view; and represents all sloth as certain to be not only unsuccessful, but extremely foolish and scandalous. And in regard the prize is given by the Master of the race, this shews us the equity of our submitting to his terms, the necessity of running in the way he hath chalked out for us, and not making to ourselves paths of our own devising. For here too, it is not the swiftness of the motion alone, but keeping to the true ground, that must make us winners at last. Once more, this resemblance teaches us the obligation we are under to hold on our course with resolution; since nothing less than coming up to the goal can crown our endeavours; and he that gives out, or is beaten off at the last heat, loses the benefit of all his labours and successes in the former, as effectually as if he had never put in for the prize at all.

1. How happy would it be for us if the importance of this metaphor were considered as it ought to be! Men would not then (in the prophet Isaiah's expression) *spend their money for that which is not bread, and their labour for that which satisfieth not.* They would not make religion a thing by the by, and allow it so few, so very few, even of their leisure hours; so many fewer than they give even to the diversions and impertinencies of the world. They would not suffer the pains and expense they are content to be at upon the occasions, nay, upon the vanities of life, so greatly to exceed those poor droppings, which are so hardly extorted from an overgrown treasure to works of piety and charity. In a word, they would not appear so extremely solicitous about trifles, so prudent managers in affairs of little consequence, and so wretchedly cold and careless, stupid and unthinking, in their main, their eternal, their only concern. For did they reflect at all, their own example would reproach them into better sense; their very pleasures would awaken a remembrance of their duty; and every race expose the absurdity of exerting all their powers to win a poor despicable prize, and of sitting still with their hands folded when engaged in a course whose end and prize is an immortal crown of glory.

2. Well were it likewise if men attended to this figure, so as to convince themselves that it is the master's and judge's part to prescribe, and the runner's to submit and comply with the rules of the race. For from want of such reflection it is, no doubt, that the face of the Christian world is so deformed with pernicious errors, wild enthusiasms and frivolous superstitions: that the religion of so many is compounded of monstrous absurdities, suited to each person's complexion or passion or humour or interest: that Scripture is distorted and racked, to make it speak the sense of private spirits or of differing parties; and that the belief and practice of so many (who falsely pretend to be framed upon one common model, while they indeed are at as wide a distance as the fancies they spring out of, or the conveniences they serve) are no longer the gospel of Jesus Christ, but

the dietates of daring wretches who presume to pervert it, for the sincere milk of the word obtruding the poison of false glosses; and who do not build up the temple of the Lord, but erect new schemes, and set them upon sandy foundations of their own.

3. But especially, well it were if a remembrance of our life being a race would encourage the steadfastness and perseverance, even of those who have in good measure escaped the pollutions of the world, detected the *cunning craftiness of them who lie in wait to deceive*, and have begun to run well. For how many of them who set out most commendably do feel (how few indeed do not feel) their zeal by degrees languish and grow cold; and though hot at hand, yet quickly abate of their speed in this spiritual race! There is therefore great occasion for keeping up our resolution and vigour by remembering, that nothing less than running the whole course can entitle us to the prize: great need often to take ourselves aside, and see what progress we have made, and whereabouts we are; what length of the field there is still before us, and how short a time is left us to compass it in. This is an inquiry very fit to be frequently and diligently made, especially at each of our approaches to the blessed table; at all solemn seasons of humiliation and repentance; (and consequently very proper to be recommended now, as a good introduction to the Lent-fast.) That so upon every fresh examination the state of our souls may be distinctly known; and that when this is rightly understood, such knowledge may produce its due effect. That if we have (us, alas! who *hath* not?) stood still or loitered, or lost ground, we may quicken our pace, and fetch it up before it be too late: or if we find ourselves moving forward, that the nearer we approach the more we may exert our strength: and not by rough ways, dead hearts, and feeble knees, by *fainting* and *growing weary in well-doing*, not only lose our crown, but have the calamity of that loss doubled to us, by disappointing all our past hopes and toil, and missing the prize to our shame and eternal confusion, when we were just in sight, and might by bearing up but a little longer certainly have secured the bliss and honour of it. Of so useful, so necessary consequence is this allusion to us; and of so much concern, to consider every Christian in this life as one engaged in a race; to reflect what value each of us runs for, and how he ought to acquit himself in the glorious undertaking.

2. The other allusion of St. Paul in this scripture to the wrostrling and cuffing in the games celebrated among these Corinthians, resembles the Christian's duty to a fight; and this is likewise a direction in several instances, particularly in these that follow:

(1.) This is a farther incitement to our zeal, as it represents to us the opposition we are like to meet with in our great affair. The former similitude supposes every competitor for the prize obliged to make the best of his way, but the present intimates a danger, not only of being outstripped by the more vigorous endeavours of others, but of encountering great difficulties and obstructions in our own. And therefore it calls upon us to prepare for a combat, the nature

whereof, when we rightly understand it, will plainly appear to be such as we can neither decline nor behave ourselves negligently in without suffering the utmost damage and dishonour.

For (2.) this combat is here resembled to those of the Olympic games, where men contended, not out of hatred, or with an intent to destroy, but for a prize, and with design to master their adversary. That adversary in the case before us is by St. Paul, verse 27, said to be the *body*, that is, the sensual and carnal appetites, which are ever putting us upon endeavouring after, placing our affections upon, and esteeming our chief happiness to consist in, the gratifications of sense and enjoyments of the present world. And this is reputed an adversary, because it wars against our spiritual part, diverts our pursuit of purer and more lasting joys, renders us careless of our main concern—that future state where alone complete happiness is to be had. And the more we indulge the suggestions of this part, the farther we swerve from the principles of reason and religion. Yet still this is a part of us; God hath implanted those desires in our nature for excellent purposes, he continues them there for a constant exercise of our virtue; and therefore, though the body be an adversary, yet it is not such a one as must be hated or slain, but only *kept under and brought into subjection*. These passions and affections then it is not the business of religion utterly to root out, but only, by prudent restraints and proper acts of self-denial, to govern and reduce and contain within due measures; that so they, upon all occasions, may obey, and the nobler faculties of our mind may rule and set bounds to them.

(3.) That these self-denials may not be misunderstood as commands tyrannical and unreasonably severe, we shall do well once more to cast our eye upon the allusion made use of by the Apostle. Who, at verse 25, compares them to the temperance prescribed and practised by way of preparation for the Olympic games. The observance whereof contributed to men's activity and vigour, and more successful performance in the parts they undertook and desired to signalize themselves by. This is directly our case. God does not tie us up with arbitrary laws to unnatural cruelties, that should make life a burden, but commands us to maintain such a conflict as the condition of human nature hath made unavoidable; and in it to subdue such desires, and deny ourselves such gratifications only, as, when freely indulged, are prejudicial, and obstruct the great end and true happiness of human nature. Such as are below the dignity and disturb the operations and enervate the noblest powers of a reasonable mind, and therefore ought to be curbed by us as men. But especially such as are inconsistent with the strict sobriety and purity, with the generous charity and heavenly-mindedness of Christians. Who, as such, should in their whole behaviour keep up the distinction between a perishing body and an immortal soul; and reckon all below but dross and dung in comparison,—no farther worth their care than as it may be serviceable to them in obtaining, but not by any means fit to come in competition with, or suffered to divert them from or hinder them in their endeavours after, their incorruptible crown of glory.

Since then the reward we have in view is so excellent, if the terms of attaining it were yet much more difficult, we could not be just to our own interest, should we refuse to comply with them. But then, since those very terms are for our interest, how inexcusable are those wretched men who will not submit to the methods of being as happy as they can be here, in order to being infinitely happy hereafter! The combat I have been treating of every man is called to; and every man, if the fault be not his own, may prove victorious in it. That passage before us of *one obtaining the prize*, is not intended by St. Paul to lessen our hopes, but to encourage our labours; and meant to teach us that the utmost we are able to do is little enough, that the benefit we aim at will recompense all our pains, and that each person upon that account should exert himself as vigorously, and be as careful not to be outdone by any other, as if only the one best in the whole number could win the prize that all are striving for. Let us then (and God grant we may) put forth our whole strength, fix our minds upon this crown, and be continually pressing forward to it. Let us not suffer our thoughts to be dissipated by impertinence or vanity, by any of the follies or the trifles which upon pretence of entertaining would loosen them, and break their force in this most necessary as well as most important affair. For we are not so much as at liberty to engage in or to stand clear of this race and combat. Were the choice left to us, yet not to come in were to be undone. But that was happily made for us long ago; we set out in this course, and were listed in this service at our baptism, and cannot retract without desertion and apostasy. The greater reason is there, why, having gone so far already, we should by all means disengage ourselves from the weight of our sensual and corrupt affections; mortifying them by the abstinence and other holy severities proper for that season of humiliation and fasting to which this portion of Scripture is so wisely propounded by our admirable church as a seasonable preparation. And lastly, let not any of us presume to think those remedies a dispensation below us, to which St. Paul himself did not disdain to have recourse. For if he, who was *caught up into the third heaven*, favoured with extraordinary visions and revelations above the power of human tongue to utter, intrusted with the conversion of so many nations, and indefatigably laborious in that ministry; if he, notwithstanding all these virtues and advantages, found it necessary to *keep under his body*, and *bring it into subjection*; if he saw reason to fear that otherwise he, *after having preached to others, should himself be a castaway*; what care can be too great for us, whose attainments and zeal are so much less? And how can we answer it to God, or to our own souls, if we so far forget our own sinfulness and frailty, as not readily to submit to every method of forwarding us in the race that is set before us, and make not a diligent and thankful use of every advantage and defence in this war of the spirit against the flesh? For sure we ought to esteem it a most happy thing, if by all possible

means we can at last arrive to that unspeakable blessing, of having *our whole spirit, and soul, and body, preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and be in that great day ^dmercifully delivered by his goodness: which he of his infinite mercy grant we may; to whom be glory and honour for ever and ever. Amen.*

Septuagesima, or the third Sunday before Lent.

THE GOSPEL. Matt. xx.

1 *For the kingdom of heaven is like unto a man that is an householder, which went out early in the morning to hire labourers into his vineyard.*

2 *And when he had agreed with the labourers for a penny a day, he sent them into his vineyard.*

them, according as they were to be met with, at their usual place of standing, at different hours of the day. Some presently after sun-rising;

3 *And he went out about the third hour, and saw others standing idle in the market-places,*

4 *And said unto them; Go ye also into the vineyard, and whatsoever is right I will give you. And they went their way.*

5 *Again he went out about the sixth and ninth hour, and did likewise.*
the Jews' third and fourth watch.

6 *And about the eleventh hour he went out, and found others standing idle, and saith unto them, Why stand ye here all the day idle?*

7 *They say unto him, Because no man hath hired us. He saith unto them, Go ye also into the vineyard; and whatsoever is right, that shall ye receive.*

8 *So when even was come, the lord of the vineyard saith unto his steward, Call the labourers, and give them their hire, beginning from the last unto the first.*

9 *And when they came that were hired about the eleventh hour, they received every man a penny.*

10 *But when the first came, they supposed that they should have received more;*

1, 2. The method made use by God in distributing the advantages of his blessed gospel may be not unfitly resembled by that of an householder calling in workmen, and contracting with

3, 4. Others at nine of the clock, when the second of those four watches, into which the Jews usually divide their day, begins.

5. Others again at twelve and three in the afternoon—

6. And others still at five, an hour before sun-set, and the time of leaving work.

and they likewise received every man a penny.

11 And when they had received it, they murmured against the goodman of the house,

12 Saying, These last have wrought but one hour, and thou hast made them equal unto us, which have borne the burden and heat of the day.

13 But he answered one of them, and said, Friend, I do thee no wrong: didst not thou agree with me for a penny?

14 Take that thine is, and go thy way: I will give unto this last, even as unto thee.

15 Is it not lawful for me to do what I will with mine own? Is thine eye evil, because I am good?

dost very ill to envy the good fortune of thy brethren, and think much at my bounty to them.

16 So the last shall be first, and the first last: for many be called, but few chosen.

the advantages and opportunities of salvation are offered is great; but that of the men who answer and make the best of them is, in comparison of the former, very small.

14, 15. Thou hast had thy bargain, and so no reason to complain; thou oughtest not to trouble thyself how I deal with others. Nor am I bound to give thee an account, who

to give thee an account, who

16. Thus it shall be in the gospel benefits too: because the number of them to whom

COMMENT.

Many wise reasons (particularly that of insinuating necessary but unwelcome truths in a manner as inoffensive as might be) moved our blessed Lord to speak so much in parables. But, to help our understandings in the studied ambiguity of such figurative speeches, he frequently applies or concludes them with some figurative sentence, which may serve as a key to their meaning and main design. Thus it is here. *The first shall be last, and the last first*, is an aphorism at the end of the chapter foregoing, intended to be illustrated by this parable, and repeated again in the close at the 16th verse, with an express direction how to interpret the passages leading to it; *So the last shall be first, and the first last*.

In order therefore to know what cases and doctrines are referred to by this allusion, it may be of some use to consider the places where this sentence occurs, and the occasions upon which it is introduced: the rather, because, being but few, they will neither employ us long, nor endanger any confusion in the application.

In the thirteenth of St. Luke, verse 30, it follows a prediction concerning the exclusion of the Jews for their obstinacy, and the vast and happy confluence of the Gentiles into Christ's church. That they, whose ancestors were patriarchs and prophets, should be shut

out from their glories, and strangers from every quarter admitted to partake with those good men in honour and bliss. But then the 24th and 25th verses make it plain that this exclusion of the Jews was not an act or decree purely arbitrary, but inflicted as a punishment for their wilfulness and pride; and because they did not think it worth their pains to enter in at the *strait gate*, now made the only inlet to the regions of the blessed. On the other hand, the promotion of the Gentiles is, in that and other scriptures, mentioned as the consequence of their eager and indefatigable zeal. A zeal expressed by *coming from far, by pressing into the kingdom of heaven, by being violent, and taking it by force*. Now in this regard the Jews, who were *first* (superior in privileges, and earlier in the tenders of happiness), came to be *last*, failed, and fell short of it; and the Gentiles, who were *last* in opportunities and common esteem, became *first* in success; were forwarder in their duty, and greedily embraced those benefits which the other despised and suffered to go beside them, when every thing seemed to favour their pretensions and promise a certain possession.

In the nineteenth of this Gospel, the tenth of St. Mark (parallel to it), and the close of the parable now before us, the words seem not so much to concern those who absolutely lost what they seemed in better condition to attain, and others who, from a state in appearance desperate, became happy, as to state the comparison between persons, who all of them obtain a recompense, though it be awarded to each in different and very surprising measures. Thus the labourers here all received wages; some indeed more, some less, than was expected: but, which was strange, they whose fatigue had been longer were paid no more than others whose time had been shortest. Now since the person whose image that householder bears is Judge of all the earth, and cannot but do right; since he is infinitely above all unaccountable likings and partial fondness (as is evident from his so frequent and solemn declarations, that he *is no respecter of persons*), we have leave at least, nay, I take it, we ought to conclude, that some very wise and just considerations moved him to proceed thus with these several sorts of workmen. Reasons perfectly well understood by their Master himself, though their fellow-labourers either did not comprehend or would not attend to them. And so, in this second sense, not with regard to being miserable or being happy, but in regard of a happiness greater or less than was expected, and in proportion to the time of working being more or less, *there are many that are first which shall be last, and last which shall be first*.

From these passages thus compared we have, I think, sufficient warrant to apply this parable, first, to the case of all mankind; or else, secondly, to that of the Jews and Gentiles in general; or, thirdly, to that of private Christians in particular. I shall state each as briefly as I can, and then conclude with some proper observations from them.

• Ver. 20; Matt. viii. 11; Luke xvi. 16. f Matt. xix. 30; Mark x. 31; Matt. ix. 16.
g Chap. xix. 30.

1. Take it in its first and most comprehensive sense, and thus it intimates that God was never in any age wanting to mankind, that he (as hath ^hbeen formerly observed) did frequently renew his call, and enlarge the discoveries of his will and their duty, by such dispensations as answer to the several hours here; but that the gospel is his last call; and after this nothing is to be looked for but the bringing men to account how they have acquitted themselves under their respective circumstances.

Next, let us view that of the Jews and Gentiles in general. To the Jews God was pleased to make the first express discoveries of his will by a written law: their nation alone, in the ages before the gospel, were blessed with a revealed religion; and, at the first publication of the gospel, our Lord confined his own presence and ministry to this people and country. So did his apostles and disciples, by his direction, during his abode upon earth, and for some time after his ascension into heaven. The several steps taken in this affair during that interval may be thought answerable to the repeated invitations of the *morning*, the *third*, the *sixth*, and the *ninth* hours. At last, which answers to the *eleventh*, this benefit was extended to the Gentiles. They readily accepted it, and by so doing became partakers of the same grace and precious promises with those who had all along been brought up under the legal, and from that removed sooner under the evangelical, dispensation. This gave great offence to those earlier converts, who thought themselves ill dealt with, and their services not sufficiently considered, when men, from darkness and idolatry, were at once translated into the same marvellous light; and all that distinction of favour taken away which had been the boasted prerogative of their race for so many generations, and kept up at the expense of a law very rigorous and burdensome. All this, in fact, appears from Holy Writ. So that there is scarce any circumstance in the parable to which their condition and behaviour did not suit: and it must be confessed, that no interpretation comes so strictly and literally home to it as this.

But then we may be allowed, from the occasion of this parable, set down at large in the chapter last before, to apply it to particular Christians too, in some, or in almost all of the following respects:

As the apostles left all and followed Christ; as the primitive Christians gave in their names to his doctrine, and continued steadfast in it, at the certain peril of their liberties, their friendships, their fortunes, nay their lives. And yet, in any after-ages of Christianity, they who live and die, though quietly and peaceably, in the sincere profession of this religion, are promised the kingdom of heaven as a reward for their faith and obedience.

So again, some have the happiness of a pious education, and carry on their early virtue through the several stages of life; others, who either wanted that advantage, or have neglected to improve it, run into the same excess of riot with the unthinking part of the world:

and yet if these, though late, see their follies, and effectually forsake them, and become new men, the promise of God standeth sure, that *at what time soever the wicked man turneth away from the wickedness he hath committed, and doeth that which is lawful and right, he shall save his soul alive.*

Thus, once more, some are continued to a good old age, and by variety of trials, and a long course of obedience, bring glory to God. Others' hearts are good, and equally disposed to do so, but being taken short, and snatched out of the world betimes, they are denied opportunities for it. And both shall come to heaven: the mention of which case, if it seem foreign to the matter in hand, I desire it may be remembered, that as the aphorism *Many that are first &c.* is thought to have been proverbial among the Jews, so have they another expressly to this purpose, that he who lives well, and is cut off in the midst of his days (continues but half the time set out for the age of man), shall be equally rewarded with him who lives seventy years, or the utmost term allotted for man's life.

If against these cases it shall be objected that some passages in the parable, particularly that of the murmuring labourers, cannot agree with our expounding it of the rewards, and therefore we must restrain it to the knowledge and first admission to the privileges of the gospel: the reply may be, that to justify the application of a parable, it suffices that the main design be kept close to; that many passages are inserted for ornament and illustration only; that this in particular may mean a reward so surprisingly great, as among men would provoke the envy of others; and that the connexion between this and the nineteenth chapter seems to import some other meaning besides that of bringing the ¹Gentile converts upon the same level with the Jewish; as I shall have occasion hereafter more fully to explain.

Having thus done with propounding the several cases to which the scripture before us may be accommodated, it only remains that I raise from it such useful observations as may answer the design of our excellent church in recommending it to our thoughts at this time.

And first, we are, upon this occasion more especially, obliged to take notice of the kindness of this householder in calling these labourers. And that not once only, but again and again; entertaining all that came, and very bountifully rewarding all he entertained, though the time some of them were employed had been but very short. All this does our heavenly Householder too. He appoints and calls us to our duty, he frequently repeats that call, and does not cast us off at our first refusal. Nay, he does more than any master upon earth can do; for he prepares our hearts to hearken to his calls, he strengthens and assists us in the duty we are called to; he rewards us according to our good dispositions, and graciously considers what opportunities we had, and what use we would have made of more, if we had had more. It is by him that we begin, go on, and

¹ Ezek. xviii. 27.

² Capell. in loc.

³ Gospel for St. Paul's Conversion.

persevere as we ought. And when he calls us to receive our wages, he pays us for the work which without him we could never have done; a work which cannot deserve, but yet which is a necessary condition of our reward. And herein are manifested the freedom of his grace, and the greatness of his bounty; not in bringing men to heaven without good works, but in doing it for such works as himself empowers them to discharge.

Secondly, we shall do well to observe how the command here runs, *Go ye into the vineyard*, that is, to labour there. And as in a vineyard there is great variety of employment, so is it here likewise. And a man then and there only labours as he ought, when he diligently and conscientiously discharges the duties of his own station; when he considers the post, and the several relations Providence hath placed him in: and whether he be magistrate or private subject, priest or parishioner, parent or child, master or servant, rich or poor, trader or labouring man, studies the part belonging to him, takes care to answer all just expectations from his character, and honestly follows his particular business and calling. This then is truly and properly to work in God's vineyard, to do our duty to him and to our neighbour. The state of a Christian consequently is not a state of idleness and ease. This state is that vineyard which we are already entered into. We were so at our baptism, and it is too late to think of retracting, unless we resolve to give up all our hopes, and are content to forfeit all our pretensions to our wages. If therefore we have been careless and have lost time, this must be made up by doubling our diligence. And it is probable, this was the motive that induced the householder to make his latter labourers equal in pay, that they had plied their business harder, and made themselves equal in dispatch with those who were hired early. This, it is evident, was the case of the Gentiles, who came up to the Jews in every instance of faith and obedience. This was St. Paul's, who though called the last of them, yet *laboured more abundantly than all the apostles*. And it is often the case of late penitents, whose sense of their former miscarriages and neglects is apt to inflame their zeal, and to put them upon making reparation by more exalted acts of piety and virtue. And this is most agreeable to that character so frequently given of our great Master, that he *rewards every man according to his work*.

Thirdly. The instance of the murmuring labourers should teach us humility and charity: not to be puffed up with a vain opinion of our own deserts, not to undervalue those of our brethren: to receive our recompense thankfully, as the full that does, as more indeed than strictly can, belong to us: and to rejoice in the happiness of others, as no diminution, but an increase rather to our own. And therefore we should be so far from presuming to grudge, or call our Master to account for his liberality to our fellow-labourers, that it should be rather matter of the highest satisfaction to see those recovered out of the snare of the devil who used to be taken captive by him at his will. For it is the effect of God's mercy that we ourselves were admitted to so profitable an agreement, how early soever we came in,

and when ourselves have what we covenanted for ; as it is no wrong, so neither ought it to provoke our indignation, that others are bountifully dealt with. For even supposing them to receive over-measure, this hurts not, and therefore should not grieve, any who receive their full measure.

4. Fourthly. Let us be sure to make a right use of the encouragement given here to these labourers at the *eleventh hour*. Which must be done, not by rendering it an argument for presumption to soothe us up in impenitence or sloth ; as if God were bound to receive us at what time and upon what terms we please. This is extremely to pervert the text, which tells us indeed that call was the last ; but it does not tell us that they who refused his former calls were called again and again. If this be done, it is grace and favour, not justice and debt. But we who live under the ministry of the gospel have his calls daily sounding in our ears ; and if we continue obstinately deaf, cannot be sure that our last call is not already over. The true benefit then arising from hence is, to all such as have had the unhappiness to lie long in sin and ignorance, that God will accept and reward them, though they come late into the vineyard, provided they then apply themselves heartily to their Master's business, and work faithfully to the uttermost of their power. That he makes gracious allowances for hinderances and infirmities, but then he expects that we should be sensible of them too ; that we should lament and strive against them, and do the best we can ; remember, that the longer it is before we begin, the less day we have to work in ; and therefore make the more haste to be ready for the evening that draws on apace, when an account of what we have done shall be taken, and our wages awarded accordingly. This is the true intent of the parable in that part of it. And so well does the Gospel fall in with the Epistle of this day ; and both together so very well agree, to fit us for the approaching time of mortification, designed to awaken the sluggish, to quicken the loitering, and set forward every labourer in this spiritual vineyard. And oh that we all may receive instruction from hence, and be wise ; understand our advantages, and the goodness of our Master ; consider our latter end, the approach of that night which must end in day eternal ; the happiness of that approach to all diligent and faithful labourers, but the terror and dismal consequences of it to every slothful and unprofitable servant ; that so we *may work the works of him that sent us into this vineyard while it is day, before that time come wherein no man can work !*

*The Sunday called Sexagesima, or the second Sunday
before Lent.*

THE COLLECT.

O Lord God, who seest that we put not our trust in any thing that we do; Mercifully grant that by thy power we may be defended against all adversity; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

THE EPISTLE. 2 Cor. xi. 19.

19 Ye suffer fools gladly, seeing ye yourselves are wise. 19. Ye (like others who are or pretend to be wise) can surely bear with the indiscretions of others.

20 For ye suffer, if a man bring you into bondage, if a man devour you, if a man take of you, if a man exalt himself, if a man smite you on the face. 20. And what I am about to trouble you with, is plainly a great deal less than your false teachers put upon you, whose enslaving you to the Jewish law again, whose insatiable avarice and making a prey of you, their insolence and tyranny, and contumelious usage to the most intolerable degree, you can patiently away with.

21 I speak as concerning reproach, as though we had been weak. Howbeit where-insoever any is bold, (I speak foolishly,) I am bold also. 21. And yet what have they to value themselves upon that I have not?

22 Are they Hebrews? so am I. Are they Israelites? so am I. Are they the seed of Abraham? so am I. 22. In all the privileges of birth and descent, I am equal.

23 Are they ministers of Christ? (I speak as a fool) I am more; in labours more abundant, in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequent, in deaths oft. 23. In the relation to and service of Christ, (excuse the liberty I take in speaking of myself,) I am superior to them: my sufferings for the gospel prove me so.

24 Of the Jews five times received I forty stripes save one. 24. I have been five times scourged by the Jews, to the utmost degree of rigour ever used by them. See Deut. xxv. 3.

25 Thrice was I beaten with rods, once was I stoned, thrice I suffered shipwreck, a night and a day I have been in the deep; 25. See Acts xvi. 22, 23. and Acts xiv. 19.

26 In journeyings often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils by mine own countrymen, in perils by the heathen, in perils in the city, in perils in the

wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren ;

27 In weariness and painfulness, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness.

28 Beside those things that are without, that which cometh upon me daily, the care of all the churches.

it is a constant, so it is a very heavy article.

29 Who is weak, and I am not weak ? who is offended, and I burn not ?

I sympathise with him ; none discouraged in his duty, or in danger of falling off from his principles, but I even burn with zeal to reduce and settle him.

30 If I must needs glory, I will glory of the things which concern mine infirmities.

the subject I choose for it is such as others would rather account matter of humiliation, my sufferings for the gospel.

31 The God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which is blessed for evermore, knoweth that I lie not.

28. And the perpetual concern I am under for the churches planted by me ; as

29. Among all these no person is afflicted, but I

person is afflicted, but I force me to glory : but the

30. Your seducers, and the partiality shewn to them,

force me to glory : but the occasion, I solemnly appeal to God, &c.

COMMENT.

THIS portion of Scripture is the more remarkable, because it presents us with a great apostle engaged in an act very unusual, and (generally speaking) very unbecoming that character, I mean, the commendation of himself. It is therefore highly necessary, in order to understand and be able to account for such proceeding, that we consider very carefully, first, the occasion, secondly, the manner of it. After which, I shall draw some reflections from the whole.

1. The occasion, it is plain, was the corruptions brought into the church of Corinth by some false teachers, who (like those of the same stamp in every age and church) had insinuated themselves into the affections of the people ; as by other arts of subtlety and deceit, so more especially by extolling their own ability and merit, and by disparaging reflections upon their regular pastor. The people, it seems, were there (as they usually are) credulous and easy enough to be caught with this guile ; drunk in the prejudices against St. Paul, and were grown so immoderately fond of their new teachers, that at the same time they thought the just and gentle authority of an apostle a yoke too heavy, the utmost vanity and insolence, the most insatiable pillagings and avarice, the most imperious tyranny and contumelious treatment, went down very contentedly from the hands of those idolized intruders. Had this partiality had no farther consequence than the lessening St. Paul's private profit or reputation, he would not have thought it worth while to vindicate his honour so solicitously.

But foreseeing that so undeserved a preference of the man would certainly bring on a liking of their errors, and so endanger the souls of as many as should adhere to them, charity to his brethren called for justice to himself. And for the sake of those deluded wretches, and to do right to the truth, he found it necessary to assert his due, to provoke those bold detractors to a comparison; and so at once to shew how much he, how little they, were able to produce in proof of an authority which he was legally invested with, and exercised with lenity and temper, but they by dint of arrogance took to themselves, and abused to the vilest purposes of calumny and faction.

Such was the occasion, such the end of our apostle appearing here, in a figure so unlike that he commonly makes in his writings. Which, though they be so reasonable and so urgent, he yet manages so as to clear his humility of all suspicions that the most captious adversary could cast upon it. As may appear from my

2. Second particular. The manner of this proceeding. In which we ought to observe,

1. The many apologies for, or seeming condemnations of, himself in giving way so far to the provocation of those who spoke or thought dishonourably of him. Of this kind are those expressions; *I speak foolishly*, ver. 21; *I speak as a fool*, ver. 23; *If I must needs glory*, ver. 30; *It is not expedient for me doubtless to glory*, chap. xii. 1; *I am become a fool in glorying, ye have compelled me*, xii. 11; with the rest to the same purpose. So cautiously does the apostle behave himself in a point which he rightly understood to be so nice. For as the expatiating upon ourselves without any necessity is of all faults in conversation the most nauseous and offensive; so the being extremely tender and officious even in our own vindication is seldom free from vanity. This is the case of all mankind, but especially the ministers of Christ; who must expect a share in calumnies and contradictions, and ought to be armed with patience to endure them above the proportion of common men. When therefore these have influence upon their personal advantages only, it is generally better to leave the clearing of their innocence to time and the evidence of a good conversation. Where they reflect upon their character, and, by poisoning the people with ill impressions, tend to obstruct the efficacy of their labours, the cause becomes public, their charge is concerned, and a becoming solicitude to set all right in such circumstances is no longer zeal for their own, but charity for other men's safety and good. And yet even in these circumstances, St. Paul's example teaches us how careful we ought to be in warding off all the spiteful constructions apt to be made of the most necessary and the most modest publication of our own conduct and deservings.

2. Some farther instruction of this kind may be gathered from the subject which St. Paul chooses here to enlarge upon. Not the greatness of his miracles, not the power of his eloquence and arguments; not the success of his labours, the number of the converts he had won, or of the churches he had planted; though no man could with greater right have alleged these; but only the toils and hardships, the perse-

cutions and afflictions which the discharge of his ministry had engaged him in. These were such privileges as his adversaries neither had nor desired to have to boast of. They, as the 20th verse intimates, had other things in view; the gain of private contributions, the command of their hearers' purses, and an absolute dominion over their persons*. The grounds upon which they exalted themselves were all taken from worldly advantages, and in that respect St. Paul is content to declare himself their equal. The regards he declares himself their superior in are such as they were well enough satisfied to give him preference in; stripes and imprisonments, shipwrecks and deaths, hard and perilous journeys, cold and hunger and thirst. ^b These it was so far from vanity to glory in, that the apostle found it requisite to subjoin his being honoured with extraordinary visions and revelations, to prevent so great a degree, so constant a succession of sufferings, from being turned into an argument of God's displeasure against one so incessantly exercised with them. And yet these afflictions were really the properest and most worthy matter of glorying to the apostle. The properest, because it was perfectly free from vanity or self-seeking, (for his were not sufferings either industriously courted, or magnified to be made a gain of,) and the most worthy, because to all who duly considered them they were proofs of large measures of grace supporting him under them, of unparalleled sincerity and zeal disposing him so cheerfully to persevere in encountering them, and of the truth of that doctrine which, by the ministry of one so ill treated, could yet gain so much ground and triumph over them.

The profit fit for us to make of the passage thus explained is as follows:

1. The description given here of false teachers should be a warning to all Christians against listening to them; an admonition to suspect and beware of such as make it their business to infuse into men jealousies and evil surmises against their lawful pastors; a sure sign that they therefore draw off their people, because thereout they suck no small advantage. For these Corinthians are far from the only instance of men's being even devoured by seducers, and finding the little fingers of such thicker than the loins of regular apostles. And if it should, as sometimes it may happen, that such may have sufferings and hardships to allege for their ministry, yet even then care must be taken to look into the ground of those sufferings; whether these also be not a profitable bargain for this world, and a persecution so called, but in truth a setting their quiet to sale at the highest market. In a word, none who urge St. Paul's argument rightly will suffer for evil-doers against the laws of men in cases where those are not manifestly against the laws of God.

2. The instance now before us shows how far we ought to be from reckoning what we endure for God's cause (when it is really God's cause) matter of sorrow or shame to us. St. Paul was, in comparison of the rest of the apostles, a labourer called in at the eleventh hour.

And he thought, as he taught the Philippians to esteem it, a particular grace, that it was given him *not only to believe in Jesus, but to suffer for his name*. The fervency of his charity and zeal made up what was wanting in point of time. And we (especially those among us that are ministers of the gospel) never make a more just computation of our services, than when we reckon them by the hardships and self-denials we are content to undergo for the good of our own souls or those of our Christian brethren.

3. Thirdly. When St. Paul, to all his other sufferings, adds the care of all the churches, and the zealous compassion over them that failed or were afflicted in them; this shews the abundance of his, and instructs us what ought to be the measure of our charity;—not to neglect, or think ourselves excused from a tender concern for, the afflictions or dangers of our brethren, upon the account of any sufferings of our own. Be our other circumstances what they will, yet still we are members of Christ's body; and while that relation continues, all the duties resulting from it must do so too. So indispensable and perpetual a duty is charity, for the souls of others especially; so far indeed are those hardships, which lie outward and open to the view of others, from being the most sensible part of what good men endure.

4. Lastly. The methods used for exercising St. Paul's patience and virtue teach us plainly, that the way in which God would be served by Christians, but especially by his ministers, is that of constancy and indefatigable diligence, and diffusive charity. That ease and idleness and luxury, and effeminate declinings of trouble for the public good, are by no means agreeable to a disciple of Jesus his character. And thus the apostle, as in the last, so again in this Lord's-day service, does by his own example encourage and prepare us for the discipline of the season drawing on. One great design whereof is, to break the softness of a nature too indulgent to flesh and blood, and to inure us to *endure hardship like good soldiers of Jesus Christ*. In which warfare the less we spare our own persons, the more we may depend upon his protection and support in the conflict, and the brighter trophies we shall raise to his glory, the honour of religion, and the unspeakable advantage of our souls and bodies both in that day of triumph and joy: which God grant us all a part in, for our dear Redeemer's sake. Amen.

SEXAGESIMA SUNDAY.

THE GOSPEL. St. Luke viii. 4.

4 *When much people were gathered together, and were come to him out of every city, he spake by a parable:* 4 The multitudes that followed our Lord to the city, he spake by a parable: *soaside were so great, that he went into a ship, and left them on the shore, and sat down and taught them out of the ship, by this following and several other parables, Matt. xiii. 1, 2, 3; Mark iv. 1, 2.*

5 *A sower went out to sow his seed : and as he sowed, some fell by the way side ; and it was trodden down, and the fowls of the air devoured it.*

6 *And some fell upon a rock ; and as soon as it was sprung up, it withered away, because it lacked moisture.*

but when the weather grew hot the sun scorched it up, by reason the soil was not deep enough to preserve it at the root, Matt. xiii. 5, 6 ; Mark iv. 5, 6.

7 *And some fell among thorns ; and the thorns sprang up with it, and choked it.*

8 *And other fell on good ground, and sprang up, and bare fruit an hundredfold. And when he had said these things, he cried, He that hath ears to hear, let him hear.*

a parable that highly deserves your attention.

9 *And his disciples asked him, saying, What might this parable be ?*

10 *And he said, Unto you it is given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of God : but to others in parables ; that seeing they might not see, and hearing they might not understand.*

have their voluntary, punished with judicial ignorance. See Matt. xiii. 11-15 ; Mark iv. 11, 12.

11 *Now the parable is this : The seed is the word of God.*

12 *Those by the way side are they that hear ; then cometh the devil, and taketh away the word out of their hearts, lest they should believe and be saved.*

they hear ; but suffer the tempter to take away the word, that is, are tempted to forget and neglect it, and so lose all good effect of it.

13 *They on the rock are they, which, when they hear, receive the word with joy ; and these have no root, which for a while believe, and in time of temptation fall away.*

14 *And that which fell among thorns are they, which, when they have heard, go forth, and are choked with cares and riches and pleasures of this life, and bring no fruit to perfection.*

15 *But that on the good ground are they, which in an honest and good heart, having heard the word, keep it, and bring forth fruit with *patience.*

6. Some fell on stony places, the heat whereof caused it to shoot apace ;

8. That which had good soil bore kindly fruit, in proportion to the condition of the ground. See Matt. xiii. 8 ; Mark iv. 8. This is

10. As a reward of your diligence and desire to be informed, these shall be explained to you ; but the rest shall be left in the dark, and

12. The persons represented by seed sown by the way side are such as take

no care to understand what

13. Compare Matt. xiii. 20, 21 ; Mark iv. 16, 17.

14. Compare Matt. xiii. 22 ; Mark iv. 18, 19.

15. By constancy in suffer-

* By constancy in suffer-

ing, and perseverance in doing well. And though all who behave themselves thus do not produce the same quantity of fruit, yet are they all good ground. Compare Matt. xiii. 23; Mark iv. 20.

COMMENT.

SCARCE any passage in the whole course of the year is more worthy our serious consideration than that which our excellent church hath wisely appointed to be read for the Gospel of this day. That heathens and Jews, professed infidels and enemies to Christianity, that they who want opportunities of knowing their duty, and would gladly use them if they could; that others who live within the pale of Christ's flock, and have opportunities, but will not use them when they may; that these several sorts of people, I say, should continue unfruitful, is nothing strange. But that many who have them, and do use them, nay, and use them gladly too; that they who *come* to the public assemblies for religious worship, as *God's people cometh*, and *sit before* his prophets as *God's people sitteth*, and attend to the preacher with eagerness and a sensible delight; that these, after all, should prove barren and unprofitable, is matter to be sure of great grief, and must be allowed to carry somewhat of difficulty and of wonder in it. And yet that so it is, that the ministers of Christ often sow where they never reap, but lose the desired effect of their pious intentions and most zealous endeavours, our blessed Saviour acquaints us in this scripture, and our own daily experience does but too visibly confirm the truth of it. So that it concerns every Christian diligently to examine into the causes of such lamentable disappointments. Which that we may know and effectually prevent, our Lord hath laid them down at large in the parable and application now before us. Of which, in order to make the best profit we can, it will be proper to observe the following particulars:

1. First, that this parable was spoken before a mixt and numerous auditory, *when much people were gathered together, and were come to him out of every city*. The other evangelists inform us, that no sooner had Jesus left his retirement, but the multitudes who had flocked in from the adjacent towns pursued him down to the seaside; that at this very time he taught them out of a ship^d; that, scarce content to allow him leisure for the common refreshments of nature, they pursued him still, and when he put to sea, procured other vessels for attending him in his voyage. Circumstances all these of great significance and use. Since these so forward, so insatiable learners, were not in all points what they ought to have been; since even to men who expressed then a zeal so eager as is scarce any where to be met with now, this lecture of profiting by what they heard was nevertheless highly seasonable and necessary. So far were they at that time from having done all that became them; so vain an imagination is it at any time for Christians to suppose that frequenting the church and being

^c Ver. 4.

^d Matt. xiii. 1; Mark iv. 1, 36.

diligent to hear God's word will save their souls at last, without producing afterwards the suitable fruits of piety and virtue in their minds and conversations.

(2.) It is fit we take good notice, in the next place, how great a loss this parable describes; which out of four parts cast into the ground tells us but of one that turned to account. No better did matters go in our Saviour's time, and with the hearers of him who *spoke as never man spoke*. Yet would not they who confessed thus much, and could never convince him of sin or of error, be either persuaded by the power of his eloquence, or won over by the perfection of his example. And though the miscarrying of three parts in four may seem an astonishing proportion under any circumstances, there is but too just reason to fear, that as the frailties and infirmities of our preachers now are infinite, and will not allow any comparison between the best of them and their great, their divine Master, so the numbers of them that fail under their ministry are infinite also; and the truly fruitful hearers but few, but very few, and far below the proportion in this parable.

3. This however, thirdly, is not the sower's fault. His business is only to scatter the grain in due season, and with a liberal hand. Now that seed, according to our Lord's own method of explaining himself, is *the word of God*, and *he that soweth it is the Son of man*. This Master of the field *went out to sow*, came down from the throne of his glory, and at the fulness of time conversed with mankind in flesh, accommodated himself to their capacities and wants, that no possible means might be wanting to render his gospel acceptable and effectual. This word he hath scattered upon all countries and kingdoms; first by the extraordinary influences of his Spirit and power, then by the establishment of a perpetual succession and order of ministers, and the faithful records of his most holy religion. If they who are now made sowers of this word should be so unhappy as to mistake it through ignorance, or so perverse as to corrupt it through malice and design, or so profligate as to disgrace it by scandalously wicked lives; yet still our Bibles are our own. These give it us pure and plain, and command us not to judge our brethren, or live by their patterns, but to approve ourselves to God, by governing our actions according to his laws. The sins or the weakness of others, in which we take no part, shall never be imputed to us. And had the errors or the vices of our pastors been any real and natural cause of the inefficacy of the word, any which might endanger the hearers' salvation by receiving instruction from men of polluted lips, it would not surely have been omitted here. For the very design of this parable is to put men upon their guard, by giving all necessary intimations whence that barrenness proceeds in their hearts which brings their souls into any manner of hazard. Since then the seed is certainly good in its kind, and since all due methods have been taken for the distribution of it, if *he who hath sown plentifully reap but very sparingly*, the blame cast upon the sower can be no better than mis-

take or mere pretence. And if we will be just, we must acknowledge his bounty and his care, and are to seek for the fault somewhere else.

4. Now fourthly, this is farther of very great moment, that although there be many accidents, as floods, or drought, or frosts, or blasts, which frequently spoil the corn after it is in the ground; yet none are taxed with unfruitfulness in this parable, except such only as are defects peculiar to the ground itself. Thus, in proportion, many things there are not at our own disposal, which must contribute to our spiritual growth, and yet no mention is made of them in this parable. Very wisely this. For had such been insisted on, we might have had some reason to conclude, that men sometimes discharge their part, but God does not bless them with increase; that he denies them necessary grace, and so curses and condemns them to barrenness, by checking those improvements which they are well disposed and labour hard to make, but cannot with their utmost pains effect it. But now, as the case is represented to us, the ground alone is accused in the figure; and consequently the heart of man, which answers to that ground, in the application. And it is but a fond abuse that men are guilty of to themselves, when they look abroad for some frivolous excuse to which the Scriptures give not the least colour; when they would shift off their own unprofitableness upon the ministers of the gospel, or, which is yet more impious, upon the partial and too sparing communications of God himself. Whereas it is the plain intention of our blessed Master, and the true scope of this whole passage, to charge the unsuccessful preaching of God's word wholly and solely upon the defects and indispositions of them that hear it.

5. Nay, which is more, and brings the matter home, I beg it may be considered, in the fifth place, that those very defects and indispositions seem to be only such as are owing entirely to men's own ill husbandry and neglect. Suffering pathways to be made over their ground, and their lands and furrows to be trodden down; not gathering out the stones, and rooting up the briars and thorns: these are assigned for the causes of this barrenness, and not any leanness or natural poverty in the soil itself. Accordingly we find that ground commended for good whose product is answerable to the quality of its soil. For the other gospels express that goodness by *bringing forth fruit, some an hundred, some sixty, and some thirtyfold.*

The plain meaning whereof is, that where God hath endowed men with greater abilities, he expects a greater increase; and where he hath dealt them more sparingly, he is very well satisfied with less. But though he does not, in this sense, gather where he hath not strewed, nor reap where he hath not sown, yet he always expects an harvest agreeable to what he hath sown. The man therefore who brings forth *thirtyfold*, and was not in a condition of doing more, is *good ground*; but he who brings *thirty* only, when he was in a capacity of *bringing sixty or an hundredfold*, must never hope to be esteemed *good ground*. As God then requires an account of our abilities and opportunities, so he makes gracious allowances for our weakness and want of them: he does not regard the quantity, so

much as the disposition; but allows mean attainments to consist very well with bringing forth fruit, such and so much as he kindly accepts, and is exceedingly well pleased with. He imputes barrenness to no man, but upon such defects as are not of nature's, but of his own making. The honest and good heart is what he requires, and what we are principally concerned to look after. He hath promised expressly upon this very occasion, that our becoming fruitful shall in great measure depend upon ourselves; that they who do their own endeavours faithfully shall be by his grace strengthened to do more: and he declares, that they who neglect their own improvement shall fall from bad to worse, lose their own powers, and forfeit his assistances. *'Take heed (says he) therefore how ye hear: for whosoever hath, to him shall be given; and whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken even that which he seemeth to have.'*

6. The last and principal thing that calls for our attention is, the different character of the good and bad ground, which by comparing them together will be found to consist in the three following particulars:

1. They that are signified by the *good ground keep the word*, and thus are opposed to *those by the way side*, who immediately lost it.

2. *They on the good ground keep it in an honest and good heart*, and in this are contrary to them *among thorns*, with whom the cares and riches and pleasures of this life choke the word, so that they bring no fruit to perfection.

3. *They on the good ground bring forth fruit with patience*, and herein differ from the *stony ground*, which represents them who receive the word with joy, but have no root; who for a while believe, and in time of temptation fall away.

1. The first qualification then observable in the *good ground* is, that the persons signified by it *keep the word*; and thus are opposed to the failing of them *by the way side*. Who (as the applications of this parable when compared together acquaint us) do *'not understand or consider the word, but Satan cometh immediately, and taketh it away out of their hearts'*. These last words in the exposition answer to those in the figure, *'that the seed was trodden down, and the fowls of the air came and devoured it'*.

Hereby no doubt are meant the careless and unthinking hearers, who frequent religious assemblies to save their credit or comply with custom; to gratify a curiosity, or perhaps to expose and start new cavils out of what they hear; but without any care to answer the true purposes of hearing; and therefore either attend not, or recollect not, or apply not to their own conscience and condition; but like the common way, have their hearts open to every fresh comer, and suffer the next trifling or wicked imagination to take place and utterly to deface the former impressions.

Such vain thoughts, I conceive, are intended by *the fowls of the air* in the parable. For it is not by any visible or violent means, but by

suggesting idle fancies, and dissipating better and more serious considerations, that *Satan catches away the good seed*. And we greatly mistake the matter, if we suppose that religious truths convey themselves to our understandings or influence our affections in a manner different from others. It is by serious application of thought, careful remembrance and frequent reflection, that we must fasten these things also upon us. And God, who gave us reasoning faculties, expects they should be employed in matters of this nature, at least as much as in any other. Where the sower hath cast in the grain, his business as a sower is at an end; but the covering up and cherishing what we have received must be every man's own work.

That then which we are principally concerned for in this regard is, to come to God's public worship and all other reading and hearing of his blessed word with due reverence and earnest attention; to consider these as the means ordinarily necessary for bringing us to himself: consequently that this word was never designed purely for our entertainment or diversion, to be nicely distinguished, learnedly disputed, eloquently enlarged upon, but to influence all the powers and put forth into action; that it is therefore called seed, because the first and common principle whence all our virtue springs; that the end of it therefore is never answered but by bringing forth fruit, and that fruit is no other than a good conversation. These are considerations which every man should be possessed with perpetually, but especially at all seasons of devotion and public instruction. And if we were so, these would check all our loose wanderings, awaken all our faculties, fix what we hear in our hearts, and so effectually convince us of the vast importance of the duty we are about, that we could scarce continue to be men, and not get above the negligent and fickle disposition of those hearers *by the way side*.

2. The next qualification I took notice of is, that the persons represented by *the good ground keep the word in an honest and good heart*. Which seems more particularly opposite to them *which fell among thorns*; of whom it is observed, that *Pleasures of the world, and the deceitfulness of riches, and the pleasures of this life choke the word, so that they bring no fruit to perfection*. These are supposed to have made a better progress than the former: to hear, and perhaps to consider and apply very seriously; but when they come to action, the business and diversions, the interests and entanglements of the world interfere, and will not let them be good Christians. Thus they do and thus they will do, wherever these briers are suffered to get ahead. For which reason our Lord, very appositely to this present subject, takes particular notice of *the deceitfulness of riches*. For deceitful they are, not only as they cheat men in the happiness and satisfaction they fondly expect from them; but upon a yet more fatal account, as they perpetually push them on to fresh pursuits, daily kindle new and more vehement desires, and defeat their repeated resolutions of ridding their hands of all encumbrances, and seeking the kingdom of God and his

righteousness. And thus they egg men on to old age and the approach of death, till they learn too late, at their last hour, that it is to no manner of purpose that we hope to compound the matter between God and mammon, but that he who will *cleave to the one* must of necessity despise and forsake the other.

What must be done to cure this unhappy disposition? The properest method I can advise is to attend to the advantage and the necessity of being truly religious; to overbalance the allurements of this present world by the prospect of an eternal glory to come; to convince ourselves thoroughly how very childish and silly a bargain a man would make, though we should suppose him able to do that which no man ever will be able to do, that is, though he *could gain the whole world*, if at the same time he must *lose his own soul*; and that there is not, cannot be any valuable compensation *given in exchange for the soul*. This sense would bring men to receive the word impartially and fairly, without any mixture of prejudice or passion; this would render us diligent in our callings, but without distraction; careful for our families, but without anxiety; inflexible to sinful, and moderate in our most lawful pleasures and enjoyments: and in such a clear and free disposition of soul that is ready to submit to the whole of religion; that closes with its duty, though it be unpalatable and counter to the affections of a sensual and worldly mind; not cleaving to one commandment because it may be reconciled with our present profit or delight, and taking distaste at another because it checks us in or dobars us from them. In this candid, open, dispassionate temper of mind, I take the *honest and good heart*, mentioned here, principally to consist.

3. The last difference observable here is, that the persons resembled by the *good ground bring forth fruit with patience*, whereas *they on the stony ground receive the word indeed with joy*, but *have no root*, and therefore, though *for a while they believe*, yet *in time of temptation they fall away*. These men we may suppose to be proof against common cares and accidents, but if some unforeseen difficulty or trying affliction assault them, those undermine the unfaithful foundation quite, and wash the building off from its sandy bottom. The mark then of an *honest and good heart* in this respect is *patience*; a firm and steady piety, (like that of St. Paul in the Epistle for this day,) not to be shaken with hardships and sufferings for the truth. And though the giving ground in such cases be what we are apt rather to pity than condemn, because it looks like the effect of human infirmity, yet our Saviour here makes those yieldings an argument that such men *have no root*; that is, they were not well principled at the bottom. And indeed the similitude in this parable proves this evidently. For the same heat of the sun which scorches and burns up the corn that wanteth depth of earth, does but cherish and ripen the good corn. And thus it is with afflictions: they do not make men unsincere, but find them so, and discover them to be so. The fire separates the dross from the

gold, but it makes no part dross which was not dross before. And adversities are therefore called trials, because they bring men's integrity to the touch. They shew whether they serve God for present profit and convenience, or for his own sake, and from a well-grounded persuasion of their duty. Hence it is clear we must not satisfy ourselves with hearing, and considering, and applying; but must compose our minds with quiet and contented submission to the good providence of God, and esteem it our joy and crown when we are counted worthy to suffer for Christ and righteousness' sake. If Christianity required the conviction of our judgment only, all that will be content to think and understand impartially must be good Christians. But because the gospel is intended to rule in our hearts, and to give law to all our passions and all our interests, therefore it is that so great quantities of this spiritual seed are sown in vain. And since no man answers the end of that seed who refuses in practice what he allows in speculation, by letting go his hopes of bliss in another world for the declining any miseries that can be endured in this world; therefore the virtue which faints in the day of trial, however prosperous and promising it may appear, is allowed no better a character than that of grain cast upon stony ground.

There is another sense of the word *patience* fit to be taken notice of, as it signifies *perseverance*, and a contented waiting for the appointed weeks of harvest. And thus the hearers of this kind will not envy them who put forth apace, and spend themselves too fast, but be content with conflicts, though they be sharp and long, and to get some ground of their lusts, though it be won but by inches. To which purpose we may interpret our blessed Lord, when comparing *the kingdom of God to corn that cometh up one knows not how*. Its growth is often not discernible by others, sometimes not by ourselves; yet live and grow it does: and if our pride and impatience, or some other ill quality, check it not, will in due time produce wholesome and kindly, which is much rather to be chosen than forward and undigested fruit. We must not therefore be discouraged if we cannot be and do what we desire and strive for. Grace as well as nature works gradually, and must be left to its own methods. And that is true of the soil of our hearts, which our Lord hath observed to a purpose not very distant from this I am upon, that the *earth bringeth forth fruit of herself, first the blade, then the ear, after that the full corn in the ear*.

There needs no more to shew what temper is required to bring forth fruit, and how it comes to pass that this is so seldom done; that the seed and the sower are blameless, and all the defects in the ground itself. The gospel sets forth our duty and our danger before our eyes. These it is the minister's part to urge. He must apply himself with all his might to persuade, to convince, to awaken, as occasion serves. But all this our Master did in the utmost perfection, and yet even he often sowed without any fruit. And the truth is,

what can we do? We can recommend religion to men's consideration, and we ought to do it as powerfully as may be. But after all we have said or can say, it will lie in their own breasts whether they will consider or no. And they who do not are hearers *by the way side*. We may tell our people how loose the world should sit about them, that a good life should be their main concern, that they must learn and practise their duty, all prejudice and interest apart: but it is not in our power to disentangle their hearts and root out their prejudices; and till this be done, they are *seed among thorns*. So, lastly, we can excite to patience, but we cannot inspire it; and they who faint and fall off are *stony ground*. Consequently, when the preacher hath done all he can do, and all he ought to do, still the efficacy and success of his instructions will depend upon the hearers themselves. Inadvertency and worldly-mindedness and impatience are obstructions of every one's making, and therefore they must be of every one's removing too. And where they are not taken out of the way, our barrenness and the whole guilt of it can rest nowhere but upon ourselves.

I have not forgotten to observe before how much of this depends upon the Divine assistance, and upon what conditions we may be sure of that to strengthen and to prosper our endeavours. Let us but add to these our hearty prayers, and the work will certainly be done; and therefore, *That it may please thee to give to all thy people increase of grace, to hear meekly thy word, and to receive it with pure affection, and to bring forth the fruits of the Spirit;*

We beseech thee to hear us, good Lord!

The Sunday called Quinquagesima, or the next Sunday before Lent.

THE COLLECT.

O LORD, who hast taught us that all our doings without charity^a are nothing worth; send thy Holy Ghost, and pour into our hearts that most excellent gift of charity, the very bond of peace and of all virtues, without which whosoever liveth is counted dead before thee: Grant this for thine only Son Jesus Christ's sake. Amen.

THE EPISTLE. 1 Cor. xiii.

1 Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity, 1. The gifts of the Spirit, so much coveted and envied

^a 1 Cor. xiii. 1, 2, 3; xii. 31; Coloss. iii. 14; James ii. 26.

I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal.

2 *And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge; and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not charity, I am nothing.*

3 *And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing.*

4 *Charity suffereth long, and is kind; charity envieth not; charity vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up,*

5 *Doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil;*

6 *Rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth;*

good; does not give way to violence of passion, meditates no mischief to (or suspects no ill of) others; takes no satisfaction in the faults, but the greatest imaginable in the virtues and commendable qualities of others.

7 *Beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things.*

8 *Charity never faileth: but whether there be prophecies, they shall fail; whether there be tongues, they shall cease; whether there be knowledge, it shall vanish away.*

9 *For we know in part, and we prophesy in part.*

lightened, is very imperfect, and short of that which we shall know hereafter.

10 *But when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away.*

assistances of the Spirit are vouchsafed shall be at an end, there is an end of them too. So that they are plainly temporary, and never meant, as charity is, to continue always.

11 *When I was a child, I spake as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child: but when I became a man, I put away childish things.*

12 *For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know*

among you, are yet in no degree so necessary for one's self or so useful to others, as the grace of charity;

3. Nay, even the most exalted acts of piety and zeal lose all their value, if they do not proceed from this principle of charity.

5. Doth not think any good office unfit to be condescended to, (so Chrysost.) does not confine its endeavours to its own private

good; are always in season, whereas those extraordinary gifts of prophecy, &c. have their periods and particular occasions.

9. For the utmost we know, even when thus en-

10. And therefore when that imperfection and those occasions to which these

in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known.

13 And now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three; but the greatest of these is charity. 13. Nay, even faith and hope, though excellent virtues, are not yet equal to charity. The present state indeed requires and exercises all the three; but in the future state, the two former will be superseded by vision and enjoyment, and charity only will then remain.

COMMENT.

THE Epistle for this day is in substance nothing else but a commendation of charity; consisting partly in a preference given to it above other gifts and graces, and partly in a description of it, by such effects and properties as demonstrate the excellency and usefulness of the virtue itself. Concerning the first of these I am not at liberty to treat. This being the proper time for making good a former promise of explaining the nature of charity, and wherein it truly consists^b. Reserving therefore the preeminence of this grace above the rest, to be shewn at an occasion already laid out for that purpose, I choose to confine my thoughts at present to those marks and qualities mentioned in this chapter which may give us a just notion of the thing; and consequently enable us to form a right judgment, whether our souls be of that frame and temper so necessary to our salvation and acceptance with God, that the highest attainments without it shall, we are told here, *profit us nothing*.

It hath been observed heretofore^d that charity, properly so called, is that affection of the mind whereby we love God for his own sake, and our neighbour for God's sake. That this is the principle which distinguishes it from such a love as either the tenderness of nature or nearness of blood, or friendship and acquaintance, or convenience and interest, are apt to dispose us to. And how essential this principle is, the apostle here informs us, when supposing that a man may give even *all his goods to feed the poor*, without any true Christian love to his brethren; and his *body to be burned*, without any true love of God. If then the most specious instances in either sort, such as martyrdom, and devoting a man's whole substance to the relief of them that want, are no necessary proofs of this virtue, it follows, that the grace here so highly recommended does not consist in any outward acts, but in the inward disposition of the heart; and that those acts are no farther of any value than as they proceed from and are sanctified by this disposition.

It was therefore fit for St. Paul, after having hinted that the connection between those instances, which seem to be the most perfect in their kind, and that grace they so nearly resemble, is not so close and necessary as will warrant us from the former certainly to infer the latter: it was fit to assign some characters, which may prevent

^b See above, p. 4.

^c Ver. 1, 2, 3.

^d See above, pp. 5, 293.

^e Ver. 3.

any dangerous mistakes in judging of this matter. So that where these are found, we may be confident the face of religion such behaviour carries is genuine; and where these are not, how pompous soever the appearance be, we may assure ourselves it is but counterfeit.

This is the use to be made of those properties specified at the 4th, 5th, 6th, and 7th verses. Not so much for the judging other people and the state of their souls, (which do not much concern us, except so far as we may help and direct their endeavours to judge and understand themselves,) as for the preventing any false confidences, and setting us right in the notions of our own. And to this purpose, I shall make it my business to explain these qualities in such a manner as the limits expedient for this discourse will allow; far from such as so noble and profitable a subject deserves.

The first of these is, that *charity suffereth long*. By which is meant, that they who have this virtue are not apt quickly and upon slight occasions to conceive a displeasure, much less to meditate revenge, against those who behave themselves ill toward them. They consider how subject to failings mankind are, how easily betrayed by infirmity and surprise and passion to things that misbecome them; they make just allowances for inadvertencies and indiscretions, and suppress their resentments for the wrongs that are manifest, so long as they continue to be tolerable. And herein they differ from the jealous and captious, the peevish and hasty; who either fancy themselves injured or affronted, when nothing like it was done or intended, or take fire at every little provocation or neglect.

2. The charitable person is *kind*. He is so far from *rendering evil for evil*, that he labours to *overcome evil with good*. His temper and conversation is sweet and obliging: as he is slow in taking just offence, so he is sure never to give any. His constant aim and endeavour is to be as beneficial as possibly he can. Quite contrary to that devilish and malicious disposition too visible and common in the world, which is continually employed in mischief; disturbing the quiet and obstructing the advantage of its neighbours; and rendering men, whom nature and religion intended for mutual helps and comforts, continual plagues and torments to each other.

3. *Charity envieth not*. A perfection still higher than the former. For many who withhold their hands from doing harm can yet be well enough pleased with seeing it done, especially to those for whom they have no affection. But he that is truly charitable takes a real satisfaction in the happiness of others. If God vouchsafes them larger measures of knowledge or virtue or riches or credit or honour; in a word, of any blessing temporal or spiritual, he grudges it not, murmurs not at it, is perfectly contented with the preference this gives such above himself, and feels a fresh delight in observing the glory of the Giver advanced and the ends of the gift answered; whoever they be who are chosen for the instruments of bringing it about, and how much soever his own endowments and reputation shall happen to be eclipsed by their brighter lustre.

4. As charity regulates our affection toward others, so does it likewise moderate that to ourselves; and therefore the next quality by which it is distinguished is that of *not vaunting*. The word is in the original obscure and ambiguous, but seems here chiefly to denote sedateness and prudence, meekness and modesty; not being rash and forward and assuming, *not exercising ourselves in matters too high for us*, as David expresses it, (Psalm 131.) not thrusting into business above our capacity and proper sphere. By this we preserve order and public peace, and contentedly keep within the bounds of that station which the providence of God hath called us to. Private men are satisfied with obeying, and those who have no lawful authority with learning; the one does not aspire to government in the state, nor the other usurp the office of teachers in the church: for where *these* things are inordinately arrogated, the persons guilty of it betray a spirit manifestly defective in this divine virtue, by aiming at posts which they are by no means qualified for, and so introducing mischief and confusion.

5. Nor does this only restrain men from pretending to talents they have not, but prevents their being exalted even with those they have. It teaches them to consider these as they are, gifts and graces^t. If these are spiritual, and such as religion is immediately concerned in, I have taken another occasion to shew that they minister very great ground for humility and thankfulness, and all imaginable care to answer the purposes they are intrusted with us for; but not the least for vanity and self-conceit. If they be those of person or of fortune, we have yet less reason to be proud of them. Because the value and consequence of these to us is not near so much, the freedom of the gift is the same, and the dangers and temptations attending them more. So great an abuse it is of blessings of every sort to be *high minded* upon their account: so right a use of them to *fear*, lest, by our negligence and misemployment, they prove at last to have been bestowed in vain.

It may perhaps be inquired, how pride and a high conceit of our own merit or abilities, which seem to determine in ourselves, and to hurt nobody else, come to have any influence upon the duty of charity, which manifestly regards some other person. The reasons are but too evident, whether we apply them to the love of God or that of our neighbour. It must be opposite to charity in the former sense, as it lessens his goodness in our eyes, by the very same proportions that it raises our own: for the more we attribute to our own strength or desert, the more we plainly take off from the largeness of his mercy, and consequently from our obligations to love and serve him in return for that mercy. And pride can never consist with charity in the latter sense, because *high* and *great* are in truth relative terms, and imply a comparison with something else: so that it is not possible for a man to represent himself thus, without representing his brethren at the same time little and low. The consequence whereof must needs be,

failure in the affection first, and then in all the outward marks of it, which are—but he who proceeds upon a false computation does not reckon to be—their due. Whereby we may perceive, how just a method, and how suitable to the nature and order of things, the Apostle goes in here, when instancing as the next character of charity,

6. That it *doth not behave itself unseemly*. It brings men off from that haughtiness and scorn in conversation which is so nauseous and offensive, and so certain an effect of their being too full of themselves: for in this, as in all other cases, a man's deportment will be governed by the reigning part of his mind; and where that is the passion of vicious self-love, no other person must expect fair quarter. Quite otherwise the virtue we are contemplating. It renders men engaging and acceptable, chooses much rather to forego or overlook a great deal, than to insist upon what it might in rigour require; it exceeds all the polishings of the world, because what they direct for decency and appearance, this practises sincerely. And is so courteous without affectation, so condescending without interest or design, that (according to St. Chrysostom's interpretation of the word) it thinks no good office, though never so mean, below or misbecoming it; but reckons whatever inconvenience such kind humiliations may occasion amply compensated by the benefit which accrues to others from them. Imitating herein that most perfect pattern of charity, the blessed Son of God, who vouchsafed to wash his disciples' feet; nay, who for the common advantage of mankind did not disdain poverty and affliction, reproach and public infamy, though they for whom he stooped so low had deserved no consideration, except that of divine justice and vengeance at his hands.

7. Nor can we wonder that charity should be so liberal of its services, so little nice in submitting to them without those distinctions, by which men are apt to be discouraged from promoting the advantage of their meaner brethren, when informed that another of her characters is not to *seek her own*. A form of speech made use of by St. Paul to denote, not that necessary care and concern for our private benefit which religion allows and requires, and which nature persuades in the first place; but such an inordinate pursuit of this as narrows the object of our desires and endeavours, and confines them to ourselves exclusive of all others. Thus he exhorts (chap. x. 24.), *Let no man seek his own, but every man another's wealth*. Thus he propounds his own practice as their pattern, *in not seeking his own profit, but the profit of many*, (chap. x. 33.) And thus he complains that all *sought their own, not the things which are Jesus Christ's*. (Phil. ii. 21.) The disposition then which he clears charity of in this place is that vicious and selfish one which looks no farther than its personal interest, which never considers one as a member of society, but stands perfectly single, and is so far from placing or seeking its private in the common good, that it would stick at no methods of purchasing the former at the expense and certain loss of the latter. The contrary virtue, implied and recommended by this character, is, such a generous and public spirit, as expects and endeavours our own in the general good; that largeness

of heart which is sensibly affected for human nature, wishes the ease and prosperity of all mankind, never separates itself from the body by abstracted views, but considers each member of them as a part of us; contributes its utmost to serve and profit the whole; and esteems the glory of God and the greater gain of our brethren an ample reward of our own labours and sufferings, and tolerable, nay (upon so beneficial an account) even eligible losses and inconveniences.

8. *Charity is not easily provoked*; so our translation reading hath represented this in meaning much the same with the first quality of *suffering long*. But the word thus rendered does not so properly import the suddenness as the sharpness of a passion. And the thing intended here seems to be, that this grace keeps the mind calm and smooth, corrects that heat which either the natural constitution or the greatness of a provocation kindles in our breasts; and even when our anger is most just, prevents its flaming out with that rage and fury so common in men who are not under this guard. Nor is it hard to discern a very natural connection between this and those good fruits last taken notice of. For as nothing does so expose us to the insults of passion as pride and partiality to one's own interest; so are true humility and generosity in no one instance more conspicuous, than in that of curbing and subduing this wild beast within us, and always preserving the decency of men, and the moderation of Christians, towards them who may have deserved the highest of our resentments, but have not by that released us from the duty of remembering that they too still are men, and carry (though perhaps very unworthily) the title of Christians; and consequently have in both respects a right to be treated as fellow-members with ourselves.

9. *Charity thinketh no evil*: does not harbour malicious and revengeful thoughts (say some), as many are seen to do, who dissemble their passion, but are full of lurking mischief, and only wait an opportunity of making those pay dear who have disobliged or injured them: and thus the Greek word here is often used for putting any fault to account, in opposition to discharge and forgiveness. Or (as others) it keeps a man from suspecting and thinking the worst of others and their actions. Of the good they do, it allows all just commendation, and is ready to acknowledge it. But as it never charges any with doing amiss, except upon undeniable evidence, so when they plainly appear to have done so, it makes all possible allowances in their favour, and is as ready to excuse or extenuate it.

10. The next, of *not rejoicing in iniquity, but rejoicing in the truth*, is likewise capable of different constructions. If by iniquity or injustice we understand the evil others do, the charitable man hath so utter an abhorrence of wickedness, so high an honour for God, who is disobeyed and affronted, so tender a regard for the souls of his brethren, whose eternal salvation is brought into apparent bazard, and their consciences wounded by it, that no consideration can be equivalent to those, or make their sin occasion of joy to him. On the other hand, the truest satisfaction he takes is in the increase and advancement of piety and virtue, the manifestation of God's glory, the propagation

and flourishing of religion, and those promises and prospects of his neighbours being for ever happy, which the pleasing observation of their good life sets before him.

If by iniquity be taken the evil of suffering, thus the charitable man hath compassion for all, but delight in none. But if applied (as often in the Old Testament as its opposition seems to warrant, if not to direct here) to falsehoods or lies; thus it declares the persons here described to take no pleasure in false reports and malicious insinuations, which tend to defame or disparage our neighbour: (a pleasure as common as it is barbarous.) But when such suggestions have got ground, and shed their vomit, to be heartily glad of hearing the injured sufferer's innocence vindicated, and his good name rescued from all the scandal that malice or mistake had blackened him with.

11. And since no man industriously contributes to events that are disagreeable to him, a necessary consequence of the former quality is that of *bearing all things*. The putting up many things which cannot be called to account without loss of our neighbour's credit, and concealing those very faults we certainly know, even multitudes of them. So far is charity from exposing men's failings to the world, or thinking itself at liberty to make them the subject of public discourse, the jest or the diversion of all companies, even for matters too foul to be excused and too notorious to be denied.

12. This, God knows, is a degree of reserve and tenderness too rarely to be met with; and therefore, to keep clear of blame, by being too easily persuaded to think ill of those who suffer by them who have it not, charity *believes all things*, that is, it inclines to credit all that can be said in favour of them that are ill spoken of, so far as any reasonable grounds for such belief offer. For as this cannot be meant of a forwardness to believe to our brother's prejudice, so neither are we to imagine that charity bereaves men of judgment and common sense by disposing us to believe to our brother's advantage things which, though it could wish true, yet are found upon inquiry to be supported by no probability or colour of truth.

13. And yet when things are come to this miserable pass, it *hopeth all things*. Though men are plainly discovered to have been as bad as report (and report is seldom short on the reflecting part) hath represented them, the charitable man does not give them over so. He does not despair of, he wishes and heartily prays for, and by all proper methods labours to bring about, their amendment. Far from that supercilious and severe disdain which presently delivers up such for lost, pronounces them reprobates, and forgets the powers and the condescensions of that divine grace, which in wonderful mercy snatches them out of the snare of the tempter who have long been taken captive by him at his will.

14. Lastly, though many attempts of this kind have been fruitless, and a world of good offices been paid with very ill returns, still charity continues unwearied, and can away with injuries and delays grievous to be borne, in hopes that God will at last open the eyes of the very worst, and give them repentance to the acknowledgment of the truth.

And this I conceive intended when St. Paul describes it as *enduring all things*. By *all things* (in this as well as in the former instances) meaning, not simply all, but such as are agreeable to the measures and end of charity. For there are times and circumstances which render the covering or the suffering men's faults an injury to themselves or to others, or to both. And therefore these are terms to be restrained according to the exigencies of the case; and so to be applied to the benefit of the party concerned as not to interfere with his own greater or the public good.

Some indeed have explained these last characters so as to concern that charity which hath God for its immediate object; and made them to import faith in his revelations, trust in his promises, patience and constancy under the afflicting dispensations of his providence. The sense is true, but seems not proper to this place. St. Paul, in appearance, designing to confine himself within the instances of charity to our neighbour, in pursuance of his argument handled in the twelfth chapter; and to shew how justly he gave the upper hand to this virtue, by declaring it more excellent than all those boasted gifts of the Spirit which they were tempted to covet so much rather. To which purpose he proceeds to observe the perpetual use and necessity of this, whereas the rest were bestowed only upon certain occasions and emergencies, and its continuance in our future and perfect state, whereas all else were only helps and reliefs to our present imperfections. But of these preeminences more at large hereafter.

That which I rather choose to press in the mean while is a serious examination of ourselves by these characters. Well were it, I should think, upon every preparation to our great feast of love at the Lord's table, if these four verses were laid open and made the standard of our inquiry upon the article of charity. The use of such a method would be of infinite use, in order to understand and to amend ourselves; that so we may not live on under a fatal deceit, and falsely imagine we are something when in truth we are nothing. For nothing we are, and no better, if we have not charity; and charity we have not, if we have not these marks to shew for it. The necessity of this virtue is so generally allowed, that all men flatter themselves with an opinion of possessing it. Insomuch that I can hardly recollect one, in all the private conferences I have been called to, that would of his own accord confess the want of charity. And yet its nature is so little understood or so little considered, that few, I doubt, are to be found who truly have it. If we value our attainments in religious knowledge, if our liberality to the poor, if our readiness to die for the truth, (and yet how many are there able to go thus far?) this Scripture declares they are of no value without charity, and that none of these is it. That neither the peevish, nor the doer of no good, nor the livors to themselves, nor the envious, nor the ambitious, nor the self-conceited, nor the insolent and haughty, nor the selfish and narrow-spirited, nor the furiously angry, nor the evil surmisers, nor the severe censurers, nor

the delighters in scandal, nor the spreaders of it, nor the rash believers of it when they hear it, are any of them charitable. Consequently none of these people's religion, what degree of it soever they pretend to, shall profit them any thing. And if so, what a dreadful case are unconceivable numbers in, who think all safe and well with them! How ought this to awaken us! how to quicken our care in searching and discovering and avoiding a secret danger, which some of us perhaps never dreamt of till this moment! How seasonably does our church place this Epistle in the front of Lent, to prevent men's deluding their souls with the severities of that holy season; as if they, though never so pompous and austere, would avail, when destitute of this comprehensive grace, this indispensable condition of salvation! How wisely hath she instructed us, how zealously ought we to pray, and never leave off wrestling with God till our prayer be granted, *that he would pour into our hearts that most excellent gift of charity, the very bond of peace and of all virtues*, lest living without this, we be at last counted dead before him! Hear us, O Lord, and whatever thou deniest us, deny us not this one thing needful for us, for Jesus Christ his sako. Amen.

*The Sunday called Quinquagesima, or the next Sunday
before Lent.*

THE GOSPEL. St. Luko xviii. 31.

31 *Then Jesus took unto him the twelve, and said unto them, Behold, we go up to Jerusalem, and all things that are written by the prophets concerning the Son of man shall be accomplished.*

32 *For he shall be delivered unto the Gentiles, and shall be mocked, and spitefully entreated, and spitted on:*

33 *And they shall scourge him, and put him to death: and the third day he shall rise again.*

34 *And they understood none of these things: and this saying was hid from them, neither knew they the things which were spoken.*

35 *And it came to pass, that as he was come nigh unto Jericho, a certain blind man sat by the way side begging:*

36 *And hearing the multitude pass by, he asked what it meant.*

37 *And they told him, that Jesus of Nazareth passeth by.*
Compare Mark x. 46; Matt. xx. 29.

31, 32, 33. In the way from the village whither our Lord had retired from that malice and rage which the miracle of raising Lazarus had so highly provoked; and presently before his triumphant entry into the city. Compare John xi. 53, 54; Matth. xx. 17; Mark x. 32.

34. These were things so contrary to their notions of the Messiah, that they could not believe, and know not

35, 36, 37. Not far from Jericho, a famous blind man, (probably the son of Timæus,) who is spoken of here singly; though another (but of less note) seems to have been healed with him.

38 *And he cried, saying, Jesus, *thou son of David, have mercy on me.* as a giver of sight to the blind, Isai. xxxv. 5.

38. *Thou the Messiah, whose character is foretold

39 *And they which went before rebuked him, that he should hold his peace: but he cried so much the more, Thou son of David, have mercy on me.*

40 *And Jesus stood, and commanded him to be brought unto him: and when he was come near, he asked him,*

41 *Saying, What wilt thou that I shall do unto thee? And he said, Lord, that I may receive my sight.*

42 *And Jesus said unto him, Receive thy sight: *thy faith hath saved thee.*

42, 43. *Thy faith hath rendered thee a proper object of this mercy.

43 *And immediately he received his sight, and followed him, glorifying God: and all the people, when they saw it, gave praise unto God.*

COMMENT.

WHAT could be more to the purpose of our present devotions, than for the church to put us now in mind of our dear Redeemer's sufferings and death? The Epistle for the day hath described and recommended to us the grace of charity: the Gospel sets before our eyes the noblest and most perfect pattern of it. The fast draws on, in which our sinful souls are to be humbled before God; it is in virtue of this death alone that we can hope for pardon. Those humiliations are to help every disciple of Jesus to die to the world; and in conformity to his death it is that we stand obliged to *crucify our affections and lusts*. Our great example kept his death constantly in view, and they who imitate him as they ought will live in perpetual prospect of and preparation for their own. Upon so many accounts is this a proper subject for our present meditations. And in regard the history and circumstances of our Lord's passion are reserved to a farther occasion, the warning given his disciples of it is chosen as more seasonable at this time. Some improvement whereof I hope may be made by employing our thoughts,

I. First, upon the occasions chosen by our Lord to foretell his approaching sufferings and resurrection.

II. Secondly, upon the different manner in which this was done. But,

III. Thirdly and principally, upon the reasons which seem to have moved him to it.

I. I begin with the particular times and occasions chosen by our blessed Lord to forewarn the disciples of his approaching sufferings and resurrection.

1. The first intimation of this kind taken notice of by the evan-

gelists was in the coasts of Caesarea Philippi. When Peter, to our Lord's question, what the rest of the world and they thought of him, replied, *"Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God."* This glorious testimony when Jesus had commended as a truth inspired from heaven, and charged them to keep that a secret for some time, he began from that time forth, says St. Matthew, to show unto his disciples how that he must suffer many things; and so on.

2. The next we meet with follows immediately after his transfiguration in the mount: where three apostles, the select companions of his privacies, were admitted *"eye-witnesses of his majesty,"* and heard a voice out of the excellent glory proclaiming him the beloved Son of God. Descending from thence, he gave a fresh proof of his divine power, by dispossessing the miserable lunatic, which his disciples, left behind, had found themselves unable to do; and then proceeds to put them a second time in mind of what should shortly happen to him.

3. The third warning is this now before us, and the last before the evening in which he was actually betrayed. Of which the remark principally to be made is, that it appears most probably (from the parallel texts in the paraphrase) to have been given, between the time of raising Lazarus from the dead, and that of his triumphant entry into Jerusalem.

II. The different manner of our Lord's imparting this astonishing truth comes next to be considered. Which, by comparing the several passages, seems to be done gently and by degrees. At first in general terms, *"The Son of man must suffer many things, and be rejected, and be slain, and be raised the third day."* The second warning comes enforced with this solemn preface, *Let these sayings sink down into your ears, for the Son of man shall be delivered into the hands of men.* This third descends to a more particular description of that tragical scene, that *he should be delivered to the Gentiles, and mocked, and spitefully entreated, and spitted on; and that they should scourge him, and put him to death,* (a death inflicted by theirs, not by the Jewish law,) *and the third day he should rise again.* So that in proportion as these things drew nearer, more full and distinct discoveries were made of them.

III. I now proceed to the third and most material consideration; the reasons which seem to have moved our Lord thus to impart these things to his disciples.

1. One great inducement, no question, was, to arm his disciples against the calamities coming upon them. For *the Shepherd to be smitten* and *the sheep to be scattered* was a distress deplorable at best, and would ask all their strength and preparation to support it. But much less difficulties, when they rush upon us unawares, supply in suddenness what they want in weight, and bear down our reason by surprising it. This is the condition of human nature, and of adversity in general. And how great soever the consternation of these disciples was upon their Master's passion, it must in all likelihood have seized them more violently, and have sat longer and heavier upon their

^h Matt. xvi. 16, 31; Luke ix. 18, 22.

ⁱ 2 Pet. i; Matt. xvii. 1-23; Luke ix. 28, 45.

^k Matt. xvi. 21; Luke ix. 22, 44.

^l Ver. 32, 33.

spirits, had the thing been altogether new and unheard of. Accordingly we find this notice had some, though not all the operation one might have expected. They seem at the time to have been stunned with the blow, but by degrees they began to recollect, and upon Christ's resurrection the remembrance of his warnings was awakened, and the true import of them understood. He therefore who knew and felt our infirmities shewed this compassion to them; as sensible that a calamity unforeseen is neither so resolutely supported nor so quickly recovered, as one whose advances toward us we have fair warning of, and time to make somewhat of provision against.

2. Another probable reason for these intimations may be, the correcting the mistakes of his disciples concerning that splendour and kingly power in which they expected the "Messiah to appear. The manner of St. Peter's entertaining our Lord's first prediction of this kind discovers that they thought such sufferings a contradiction to his character. And the times I have already observed to have been singled out for this mortifying news seem to say that it was then most necessary and seasonable to be acquainted with it, when some more than ordinary testimony of his divine excellencies had put them under temptation to think such a death impossible, and gave a better countenance to those errors in this matter which had before prepossessed them.

3. These warnings were of singular use toward removing the scandal of the cross. As upon these following accounts especially:

1. In regard they proved our Lord's death to be voluntary. The disciples, in planting the gospel, found no prejudice run stronger against them, than that of a Saviour and Lord confessed to die ignominiously, in the quality of the vilest slave and most detestable malefactor. And indeed, that a life of so much power should end in so much seeming weakness and desertion; that he to whom angels were said to pay homage, and whose commission God himself had published in thunder; he, who had checked diseases with a word, and forced death to deliver back his prey, should be bound, and scourged, and crucified himself, might well be thought a most amazing turn, and an eclipse upon the glory of his former miracles. It had certainly been so, supposing those indignities and sufferings to be a constraint upon him. But now that difficulty vanishes, these warnings prove his power the same still, that his enemies had no advantage over him but by his own permission, that he distinctly knew and chose all this. So asserting at once his power and his love in making good that declaration to the Jews, *"No man taketh my life from me, but I lay it down of myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again."*

2. The scandal of the cross is hereby removed, as those things are declared exactly agreeable to the ancient and most authentic prophecies concerning the Messiah. Hence our Lord so often appeals thither. So here, *"All things that are written by the prophets concerning the Son of man shall be accomplished. And, The Son of man goeth as it is written of*

him. And a world more to the same purpose. The frequency whereof, and the mighty stress laid upon them in this present case particularly, make it not amiss to try if I can in few words explain how the authority of prophecies comes to be so very venerable upon this account.

In order hereunto let it be remembered, that the redemption of mankind was an act of God's free grace. The whole design and the contrivance of it was entirely his. The sacrifice of his Son, though not actually offered till these last days, was yet available for former ages; to whom he therefore gave such prospects of it as he saw fit and sufficient for their circumstances. These discoveries had a double use. They laid the foundations of faith in Christ to come; and when accomplished, they were the signatures and distinctions of Christ already come. The accomplishment of things thus foretold was therefore necessary, because God had pledged his truth for them, and suspended men's salvation upon their belief in him as the Messiah, whom such events should mark out to them. But then that necessity depended on another, which was the original scheme of this wonderful work formed in the Divine mind. As these things came to pass then because they had been thus foretold, so were they likewise thus foretold, because the wise purpose of God had determined that they should thus come to pass.

The whole then rests at last in the immutable counsel of God alone; and if so, what ground is left for taking offence at the cross of Christ? Hence probably our Saviour enlarges upon all the infamous circumstances of his passion, that how unaccountable soever in themselves, or how unworthy of him we might judge them, yet one above, whose thoughts are not as our thoughts, and whose hands cannot be tied up or prescribed to, might be shewn to have other notions of them, and that every one of these indignities were of service to his design.

Since then he did for our sakes, and of his own mere goodness, engage in a design so beneficial, shall we presume to call him to account, and not acquiesce in his methods of effecting it? we, forsooth, very pertly take upon us to set up standards of justice and mercy and honour; and pretend to bring our Maker to the rules and ideas thus crudely formed of prudence and equity, and a due decorum. Vain men! we attempt we know not what. The mystery of man redeemed is a depth too vast for poor mortals to fathom. But could we comprehend the reasons of the Divine mind, such beauty and gracefulness would shine forth in every part as must needs cast us into St. Paul's rapture, *O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and goodness of God!* As it is, while we are able to see so little, and that little so imperfectly, it will much better become the condition of creatures, especially of ransomed sinners, thankfully to receive the mercy and humbly to adore the wisdom of God, than by the most detestably impious, nay most absurd and ignorant presumption, to arraign the

proceedings of a being confessedly infinite in all perfections; and undertake to amend the measures fixed by him before the world was. So little reason have we to blush at, so much to glory in, the cross of Christ.

3. These warnings contributed greatly to removing the scandal of that cross, by foretelling at the same time our Lord's resurrection. The Jews flattered themselves with a Messiah who should make his entrance among them in pomp and magnificence, full of spoils and conquests. Our Jesus was a victorious Messiah: not such indeed as they expected, but wherein he differed, his achievements and glories were singular and more conspicuous. For never was there such a defeat given, never thought of before, as when death was overcome by dying, disarmed by one that seemed its prey and prisoner, and all the powers of hell shaken and subdued by their own, as they thought prosperous, stratagems. They who attend to this impartially must needs allow, and may in some degree discern, that the allwise God consulted the honour of his Son by a new, it is acknowledged, but certainly a most successful method. For had he been less a suffering, he had also in proportion been a less glorious and triumphant Saviour.

Lastly, these things were signified to the disciples and not the common crowd of followers, because in their hands was deposited the treasure of his gospel. It was their trust and office to testify what they had seen and heard, and particularly to vindicate his memory as to the manner and willingness of his death. That this was not a thing of compulsion but choice, that none of these events surprised or confounded him; but that he knew them all, saw every step they moved toward him, and met them with the utmost sedateness and constancy of mind, notwithstanding all the reluctancies of human nature. To this effect is that charge given these persons after his resurrection: *These are the words which I spake unto you, while I was yet with you, that all things must be fulfilled, which are written in the law of Moses, and in the prophets, and in the psalms, concerning me. And ye are witnesses of these things.*

The sum of all is this. Whether we reflect upon the danger these disciples were in of being oppressed with an affliction so sensible as the death of their Master; and the insults and malice of his and their enemies; this warning was exceeding seasonable and kind to prepare them for and sustain them under so heavy a burden. Or whether we regard the epidemic error concerning the Messiah's first appearance and kingdom; these were contrived to rectify their mistakes about this matter. Or whether the scandal taken at a crucified Lord, it was fit to shew that his death was voluntary, and so a demonstration of infinite goodness and love: fit to signify, by its agreement with the prophecies, that this design and all the strokes of it were ordered by a wiser head than ours, even the counsel and appointment of God himself: fit to represent the shame of our Lord's crucifixion abundantly recompensed by the glories of his resurrection: fit, lastly, to

take all possible care of those to whom so weighty a truth was committed, and upon whose testimony the success of the Christian religion would in great measure depend.

The same warning may bring considerable benefit to every Christian careful to improve it as he ought and may do. If he use it as an occasion to silence all impious cavils and scruples raised by his own curiosity, or suggested by the profaneness of others to the disparagement of the Christian institution: if he learn hence to value, to admire this most wise and glorious dispensation; and adore the condescension and goodness of a suffering Saviour, who was content to undergo so much for wretches so unworthy: if the sight and sense of his indignities and wrongs dispose us to patience and meekness under our own: and if the consideration of all the insolence and barbarity, all the shame and pain our Jesus underwent, stir us up to an holy indignation and revenge upon our sins, the cause that he was thus exposed, affronted, misused, the traitors that with such exquisite torture scourged and nailed and crucified the body and with anguish unconceivable pierced the afflicted soul of the Son of God:—if this, I say, provoke our zeal without remorse to execute the duties of the approaching season; that is, by abstinence and mortification and true repentance, to subdue and kill the old man, and utterly to abolish the whole body of sin; thus shall we now be partakers of his death; thus shall we also be partakers of his resurrection. Amen.

The first Day of Lent, commonly called Ash-Wednesday.

THE COLLECT.

ALMIGHTY and everlasting God, who hatest nothing that thou hast made, and dost forgive the sins of all them that are penitent; ^a Create and make in us new and contrite hearts, that we worthily lamenting our sins, and acknowledging our wretchedness, may obtain of thee, the God of all mercy, perfect remission and forgiveness; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen:

FOR THE EPISTLE. Joel ii. 12.

12 Turn ye even to me, saith the Lord, with all your heart, and with fasting, and with weeping, and with mourning: 12. God still invites you to return to him, but then this must be done with sin-

^a Wisd. xi. 23, 24; Ezek. xviii. 30; Exod. xxxiv. 7; Psalm li. 10, 17; Luke xxiv. 47.

cere repentance, with all the marks of sorrow for your sins that abstinence and tears and bewailings of your wickedness can give.

13 *And rend your heart, and not your garments, and turn unto the Lord your God: for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repenteth him of the evil.* 13. But rest not in those outward testimonies; it is the grief of your hearts that God requires. For which ye have this encouragement, that he is ready to do good, tender and affectionate, not easily provoked; and when he is so, capable of being appeased and prevailed upon not to execute the vengeance he hath threatened.

14 *Who knoweth if he will return and repent, and leave a blessing behind him; even a meat offering and a drink offering unto the Lord your God?* 14. Perhaps it may not yet be too late but he may still be entreated, not to destroy utterly, but mitigate at least our punishment.

15 *Blow the trumpet in Zion, sanctify a fast, call a solemn assembly:* 15. In order hereunto, let your humiliations be solemn and public, like those in the day of atonement. (Num. x; Lev. xvi. 1.)

16 *Gather the people, sanctify the congregation, assemble the elders, gather the children, and those that suck the breasts: let the bridegroom go forth of his chamber, and the bride out of her closet.* 16. Let all ages and conditions of people join in them, and no signs of joy appear among you.

17 *Let the priests, the ministers of the Lord, weep between the porch and the altar, and let them say, Spare the people, O Lord, and give not thine heritage to reproach, that the heathen should rule over them: wherefore should they say among the people, Where is their God?* 17. Let the priests intercede for the people in the holy place, and humbly beseech God that he will not give up his own inheritance to the mercy of idolaters and enemies, but for the sake of his own honour prevent those impious reflections which their insolence will be apt to make on such an occasion, as if he had not power to protect and defend them. (Deut. ix. 28; Psal. lxxix. 8, 9, 10.)

Ash-Wednesday, or the first day of Lent.

THE GOSPEL. St. Matt. vi. 16.

16 *When ye fast, be not, as the hypocrites, of a sad countenance: for they disfigure their faces, that they may appear unto men to fast. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward.* 16. Let not your fastings be formal and vainglorious, like those dissemblers, who upon such occasions either cover their faces with a veil, or by melancholy looks and gesturos draw the observation of others. These fasters have no farther recompense to expect.

17 *But thou, when thou fastest, anoint thine head, and wash thy face:* 17. Do thou, therefore, when humbling thyself thus for thy sins, wear thy ornaments usual upon common days.

18 *That thou appear not unto men to fast, but unto thy Father which is in secret: and thy Father, which seeth in secret, shall reward thee openly.* 18. Not at all solicitous whether men take notice of thy fasts or not; but careful to recommend thyself to God, who is privy to thy most retired devotions, and shall make thy reward public for those good actions which thou hast kept secret.

19 *Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal:* 19. Let it not be thy business to heap up treasures in this world, for all such are liable to decay, and may be taken from thee.

20 *But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal:* 20. But by acts of mercy and piety (at the times of fasting especially) lay up treasures in heaven, which can neither be spoiled, nor perish, nor be taken from thee.

21 *For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.* 21. This is necessary to draw off thy affections from this world, for wherever that is which thou valuest most, there thy desires and mind will likewise centre; in earthly things, if those, upon heavenly, if these be the treasure thou esteemest and preferrest in thy choice.

COMMENT.

THIS is the day that enters us into that season of devotion and humiliation so solemnly observed in the former and purer ages of the Christian church. A season of more than ordinary instruction heretofore for informing new converts in the principles of religion, that so they might come thoroughly qualified at Easter to enter into covenant with God by baptism. A season of penance and strict discipline, for putting them to public shame whose open and notorious breaches of that covenant had given public scandal. And a season of recollection and repentance to all, who, though they had not reflected such dishonour upon their holy profession, yet by examining the state of their own souls, would find occasion more than enough for the austerities usual at this time, to humble themselves for their sins, to subdue the flesh and its appetites, to crucify themselves to the world and its pleasures, to abstract and exalt their affections, and thus, in a spiritual sense, to die and rise again with their Saviour and Lord. The commemorating whose death and resurrection this season and such religious observance of it were very reasonably esteemed a fit preparation for and introduction to.

The coming in of the world into the faith, and the charitable care of admitting to baptism children of believers early, and of administering that sacrament at all times of the year without distinction, hath superseded the first of these uses in proportion as the number of the adult who want it, and whose actual sins require actual repentance, is diminished. That this end of the Lent-fast is not now answered, is

our happiness; that the second is not, is our unspeakable misfortune. Our church in the service of this day calls upon us to lament the loss, and to wish the restitution of that wholesome discipline, which partly the abuses of some later ages, and partly the degeneracy of the present, have rendered ineffectual and impracticable. But the third use I mentioned will always continue, for this we shall ever have need, ever opportunity. The chastising ourselves is always in our power, and ought to be in practice so much more, as the decay of public and judicial chastisement hath left us more in our own hands. And a due preparation for the Lord's Supper at Easter calls for the same previous care in great measure which that for baptism did heretofore. Thus we in some degree may make our profit of this holy season to all the purposes above mentioned. And had not a very punctual observation of it been still expected from us, the church would not have chosen these Scriptures now to employ us. Both which I thought expedient to treat upon at once, that so I may from thence be able in one view to set out the several ingredients of a thorough and solemn repentance, together with the reasons for and usefulness of each of them.

Now those, as is manifest from the scriptures appointed for the Epistle and Gospel for the day, are, first, sincerity; secondly, sorrow for our past faults; thirdly, abstinence; fourthly, earnest prayer; fifthly, almsgiving; and sixthly, as a qualification common to and necessary to recommend all the rest, that every one of these be free from ostentation and vainglory. Upon each of which my design is so to treat, as first to explain the nature of the duty, and then to shew our obligation to it.

1. I begin with sincerity, implied more especially in those two commands, *Turn ye even unto me, saith the Lord, with all your heart, and rend your heart, and not your garments, and turn unto the Lord your God.* That rending the garment was a ceremony customary with the Jews to express their grief, either for some great calamity that had befallen them, or for some heavy judgment which they at that time were in dread of, is evident from a great many texts in Scripture. Nor does it appear, from any one text I know of, that God hath ever disapproved of men's expressing their grief upon religious accounts by the same outward testimonies as are used in common cases. But this indeed he absolutely disallows, that men upon such occasions should put on a show and face of grief where it is not; or rest in the sign, as if that alone were sufficient, without regard to the thing it was intended to signify. This is the prophet's, this our Saviour's meaning, that God is not to be imposed upon with pomp and forms. That the rending of the heart is what he expects, and that a garment rent, where that is not, can be of no account with him. That there are some circumstances when the outward guise of sorrow may be dispensed with, may be wisely and much better let alone. So that the inward sorrow is not always of less, is sometimes of more value, because the outward signs of it are

^b Lev. i. 6; Jobi. 20; ii. 12; Ezraix. 35; 1 Chron. xxxiv. 27; Jerem. xxxvi. 24; Matt. xvi. 65; Mark xiv. 63.

wanting. But the outward is never of any value at all where the inward is wanting. And to this purpose it is that we are to interpret that phrase of *rending the heart, and not the garments*^c; not to forbid the latter, but (according to the propriety of the Hebrew language) to prefer the former; so much to prefer it, that if one must be undone, the former is of so great consequence, that, provided this be done effectually, it matters not, comparatively speaking, whether the latter be done or not.

Thus, *turning to the Lord with all our heart* is set to denote a serious and unfeigned repentance, such a thorough and total change of desires and affections as the Scripture calls a *new heart*, a *new spirit*, and that which renders the person in whom it is found a *new creature*. When we do not only leave off to commit but even to love sin, when we find an inward complacency in God and goodness, and perform our duty with appetite and delight. Without this we may have the *form*, but not the *power of godliness*. Nor could such conversion be lasting; for nothing is so that does not proceed from inclination and principle. Nature will soon return and break loose from its constraint, and therefore, till that nature be corrected, till the heart itself be changed, no change of actions and behaviour, however artfully put on for a while, can ever avail to the ends of this command, or deserve the name of repentance.

And as these outward appearances alone can be of no service to ourselves, so neither can they possibly be pleasing to Almighty God. They cannot please him for this very reason, because unprofitable to ourselves and ineffectual for compassing the very end he aims at, which is no other than our change and amendment. But there are other considerations which must render them highly displeasing and abominable in his sight. For all dissimulation whatsoever is in its own nature so odious and vile, that nothing could prevail for the practice of it upon any account, except the hope of going undiscovered. We allow ourselves too great liberties of this kind in common intercourse with one another, and make an ill use of the certainty we have; that men cannot enter into our thoughts, and consequently may be deceived by management and ceremony, fair carriage and large professions. But if at any time this mask be plucked off or seen through, no affront is more highly or more justly resented; nobody more detested or despised than the flatterer or fawning hypocrite. The reason is, because this does not only betray falsehood and baseness in his own temper, but is a plain reproach to the person he labours to put upon, argues a mean opinion of his judgment, and that he was believed weak and despicable enough to be abused and deceived without discerning it.

Now if the case stand thus in all transactions between man and man; if we can so ill bear any advantage to be taken of the frailties and infirmities we are sensible belong to us, how impious and insufferable a mockery must that be, which thinks any doubledealing can

happens to break and divide them, destruction presently follows. And of this the devil is so sensible, that he makes it his business perpetually to sow the seeds of discord and discontent, animosities and jealousies among men. He knows that this is to play parties against one another; and that the end of it will be the dashing and breaking one another to pieces. But he, who so well understands the consequence of such separated interests in other cases, and uses them with so much artifice to our ruin, cannot be supposed to be so far forsaken of all policy and common prudence, as to employ this dangerous weapon against himself. Nor can the nature of the thing be so changed as to produce a quite contrary effect in the kingdom of darkness from what it does in all other states;—nay, even in private families, where the difference might seem more easy to be composed or overpowered. And therefore, since we see daily that *every kingdom divided against itself is brought to destruction, and that a house divided against a house falleth*; it were most absurd to suppose that our Saviour should cast out devils through Beelzebub. Because, at this rate, *Satan would be divided against himself*; and the effect of this would be that his kingdom could no longer stand. This is the importance of what we find urged at the 17th and 18th verses of this chapter.

The two following verses proceed to a second argument, in which the persons of these objectors themselves were more immediately concerned. It was a very common thing among the Jews to make use of the name of *the God of Abraham* in exorcisms. And though they made this the occasion of a great many superstitious practices, yet God was pleased many times to give success to such solemn invocations of his name; and so, by the presence of his power, to signalize and distinguish his own people that worshipped the one true God only, from the rest of the world, that still continued in ignorance and idolatry. Now these operations of a divine Spirit the scribes and Pharisees were very fond and proud of, because they thought a great deal of honour devolved upon their religion from hence, and consequently upon themselves, who were the very oracles and teachers of it to the people. And upon this account our Saviour mentions the spirits that were frequently dispossessed by their own disciples, to shew their most unreasonable malice against himself, and the wickedness of that partiality they were transported with. Who ascribed the very same operations to the devil, when done by Christ; which they freely acknowledged to be the wonderful work of God, and boasted of, and valued themselves upon them as such, when their own proselytes and children were made the instruments and ministers of them. If therefore the fruit be the same in both cases, it is manifest that the tree producing it must be the same too. And if that be owned and admired for a good tree in one case, nothing but frowardness and envy, and the incorrigible obstinacy of the very devil himself, can call it a *thorn* or a *thistle*, when the *grapes* and the *figs* gathered from it are still the same. If then I by *Beelzebub* cast out devils, by whom (says he)

do your sons cast them out ? therefore shall they be your judges. But if I with the finger of God cast out devils, no doubt the kingdom of God is come upon you.

Thirdly, The devil is that wolf who cometh not but to catch, and to tear, and to destroy. He seizeth upon men as his prey, and he is so greedy of that prey, as never to let it go again till they be forced out of his hands. So that, whenever any wicked spirit is dispossessed, this comes to pass, not for want of employing any subtilty or strength that he hath, but from having his force overpowered, and his cunning defeated, by a Being wiser and mightier than himself. And such a Being is none but God only. So that, wherever dumb and deaf spirits are cast out, this is an undeniable evidence of a superior, that is, of a divine power. All which our Lord hath very elegantly argued at the one and two and twentieth verses, under the similitude of a man standing upon his own defence, and guarding the wealth under his custody. *When a strong man armed keepeth his palace, his goods are in peace. But when a stronger than he shall come upon him, and overcome him, he taketh from him all his armour wherein he trusted, and divideth his spoils.*

Lastly, since to people of such perverse dispositions, nothing, though never so improbable in itself, will seem unfit to be objected ; if any of them should yet entertain an imagination so extravagant and wild, as that this might still be done by some collusion and private consent, and that, how opposite soever our Saviour's miracles might appear to the world, yet there was underhand a very good agreement between him and this prince of darkness, and secretly they understood one another well enough ; therefore to all the rest he adds a fourth argument, containing the direct contrariety of their ends and interests, and the utter impossibility of ever reconciling them. Where men combine together to impose upon the world, they only choose different means, but unite together in the same design. And this is as robbers take several roads for a blind, but meet at last in one place. But now, between Christ and Beelzebub there can be no such contrivance or accommodation. Their ends, as well as the methods that lead to them, are the most distant that can be ; the most destructive of one another of any that ever were. Here is a rooted and fixed enmity. The one cannot be safe except in the ruin of the other ; and the quarrel is so high that every body must be in one of the parties. No favour, no countenancing of the one, nay no indifference or neutrality is possible and consistent with friendship to the other ; so says the 23d verse expressly : *He that is not with me is against me, and he that gathereth not with me scattereth.*

To these reasons, in his own vindication, our Lord subjoins a parabolical description of the woful estate of those impenitent Jews who were but the worse for all the means of grace vouchsafed them ; and made no other use of the miracles and doctrine of our Saviour, than to add proportionably to their own misery and condemnation. While the devil was driven out of others, he got faster and stronger hold of them ; and therefore, as their sin and obstinacy was greater now than

ever, so the calamity and mischief consequent to it would be more dismal and dreadful than any that had ever befallen that nation before. As the leprosy of Naaman clave to Gehazi, so these wicked spirits, so soon as they were dislodged in one place, betook themselves to another. The Pharisees' hearts were a convenient retreat for them, and here they found all things to their wish, as if they had been prepared, and put into that posture on purpose to entertain them. These arguments of our blessed Saviour were so full and so convincing, and the judgment he passed upon those obstinate wretches so just and so moving, that though we are not told of any great impression upon their hearts, yet one of the standers by, who heard them without prejudice, and considered the weight and power of what had been said, felt herself so lively affected with it, as immediately to cry out with rapture and admiration, *Blessed is the womb that bare thee, and the paps which thou hast sucked!*

This is a natural way of extolling any one's excellency, by proclaiming the happiness of their parents. For parents know no greater felicity that heaven can give in this world, than wise and virtuous children. And sure no instance of this kind was ever comparable to that of the mother of our Lord. *All generations* might well call her *blessed*, who was honoured with a birth so wonderful, so much above the rate of common mothers. What praise, what admiration, what reverence, that is fit to be given to the most excellent of creatures, can be thought in reason too much for her, whom an angel was sent to, to acquaint her with such a conception as nature never did or can know; for her, who was impregnated with the pure, the incorruptible, the almighty operation of a divine Spirit; for her, whose *womb* God himself *did not abhor*? The best and most deservedly conspicuous among the sons of men have yet this alloy, that they are born of polluted principles, and formed of perishing and corruptible matter; such as is subject to a world of weakness and frailty, and must, in a little while, fall back again into that dust from whence it was first taken. And yet, where we see a great and generous mind, that struggles bravely with the world, and distinguishes itself from the rest of mankind, and gets above the common vices and temptations of human nature, we cannot forbear admiring it; we overlook that alloy of infirmity with which even the best of mortals are debased, and envy that honour which such persons reflect back upon their ancestors. So acknowledged a truth, and so natural a one it is, that a *wise son is the glory of his father, and the just joy and pride of her that bare him*. So effectually does the comfort of good children turn sorrow into triumph, and make a happy mother not only forget, but even bless and rejoice in that travail and pain, which is all well recompensed with true knowledge and exemplary goodness. And the honour of bringing into the world a useful and excellent person, and of being instrumental in adding to the number of glorified saints, is a joy which all acknowledge; but parents only can know and feel the real charms and sweet complacencies of it.

But, alas! what is all this in comparison of the Virgin's happiness!

For she alone had this incommunicable privilege, of having a Son of perfect and unblemished virtue, a Son of untainted and immortal nature, one absolutely above the reach of death and hell; one who died, only that he might conquer death, and lead into captivity that tyrant of darkness; one, over whose body worms and putrefaction had no power. She lived to see the flesh he took of her burst asunder the bands and brazen bars of the grave; she beheld him rise in triumph, and saw her own substance exalted to the right hand of the throne of God, decked with light as with a garment, and clothed with incomprehensible majesty and honour. And therefore *blessed* indeed was the *womb* that bare this wonderful, this divine Child, yea blessed for ever, and, in that respect, blessed above all women shall this mother be.

But yet, when we have said all we can or all we may upon this occasion, still St. Augustine's remark will hold good, that this *nearness of relation to Christ had done Mary no service, if she had not borne him in her heart to better purpose than she did in her body.* And therefore her blessedness is more owing to her receiving the faith of Christ in her heart, than it was to the conceiving his flesh as her Son. If then we would be happy, our Lord hath shewed us a more effectual and a more excellent way; he denies not the blessedness which the zeal of this woman pronounces; but, allowing that to be as great as it was possible for her to imagine it, yet, if compared with that of obedience to God's commands, he informs us, that even this was but little and low. For the reply he made extenuates the one, when put into the balance with the other, *He said, Yea, rather blessed are they that hear the word of God and keep it.*

By *hearing the word of God*, no doubt, is meant all that reverence and attention of mind, all that teachable temper and good disposition of the will, which prepares and inclines men to receive it effectually. And, by *keeping* this word, the continuing in what we have heard, and making it the rule and standard of all our conversation. The believing all those mysterious truths, and the observing and profiting under those most holy precepts which our Saviour hath taught us in his Gospel. And this our Saviour declares to be a happy state indeed; a privilege above any the prerogatives of this present world, in which one man excels another. For sure, if any temporal advantage might stand in competition with this, that of being honoured with the conception and birth of the Son of God must needs have been it. No honour, no greatness can ever be so singular, so miraculous, so immortal, and therefore none so desirable, as this. And yet even this is outdone by that spiritual regeneration whereby Christ is conceived in our hearts, and born and brought to light in the pious and just and charitable actions of a holy life.

The necessary time that I have spent in explaining the foregoing parts of this passage hath not left me at liberty to enlarge upon this subject, as otherwise I might have done, nor is it very material that I should. For two or three plain arguments will suffice to persuade us of this truth. And, if we will but attend duly to these, it will quickly appear that our Saviour hath calculated things very justly, and passed

a true estimate upon both those blessednesses, when he does not disown the greatness of the one, and yet gives so manifest a preference to the other; for,

First, every happiness is the more valuable, as it is capable of being made more general. The valuing ourselves upon having somewhat which others have not, argues a great defect in that very thing we have; and that what we esteem good, is not so, except in opinion and comparison only. This is the case of riches and honours, and the rest of our worldly advantages, which would cease to be remarkable and sink very low in our esteem, if all mankind were partakers of them in the same degree with ourselves. And this shews that there can be nothing or very little of true excellence in that object which recommends itself, not so much from our own plenty, as from other people's penury and want. For whatever is real happiness hath a sort of sufficiency in itself, and cannot depend upon such mean and ill-natured considerations, as the defects or the misfortunes of our brethren. These are proper subjects for our pity and compassion, but cannot be warrantable grounds of pride and triumph to any truly good man. Now the being the mother of our blessed Saviour is what all one sex are absolutely debarred from, and what all the other sex but one are utterly incapable of too. And it would argue God a very strange, and partial, nay a very cruel being, if he should have created so many millions of men and women, and yet have provided so slenderly for them, that only one person among that infinite number should be able to attain the greatest honour and happiness that human nature could ever aspire to. But virtue and religious wisdom lie open and in common to all. Every man, with the ordinary assistances of grace and his own faithful endeavours, may get this blessing into his possession. And no man is the less wise or the less holy for another's being so; but finds an addition to his own happiness, and a sensible joy in that of others. The more diffusive this is, the greater it is; And if it were universal, it would be greater still. Which shews that this happiness is rooted in the nature of the thing, not precarious and depending upon fancy and mere notion; that this is an extensive good fit for a bountiful God to propose, and worthy of a reasonable man to pursue.

Secondly. No other happiness is properly our own. We neither give nor can continue any thing else to ourselves; but this is strictly ours, and a joy that no man taketh from us. The virtue of a child or of a parent is ours only by reflection, and that but a very weak and distant one too. The praise of it is not due to ourselves, but to Him; and they are his excellencies, not ours, that we please ourselves with. The image indeed comes back to us, and we take a pleasing view of it, as of our faces in a glass; but neither the light nor the substance that makes the image are in the glass itself. This is only the instrument of reflecting it back again, and contributes nothing to the beauty of the face. Thus all that we can pretend to is, that Providence hath been kind in making us some way instrumental towards the shewing such goodness to the world. But still we must

remember that this goodness is not ours, but another's. The enjoyments of the present life are the gifts of fortune; and when we have them, they lie at the mercy of every capricious turn of fortune to snatch them from us again. We did not bestow them upon ourselves, and we cannot preserve them one moment, but by the permission of the Donor. But virtue and religion are properly ours. These are not our fate but our choice, the work of our own minds and the treasures of our own getting. No circumstances though never so fortunate, can put them into our possession; none, though never so miserable, have the power to deprive us of them. We need only be kind to ourselves, and we shall certainly have them; and we must conspire against ourselves if ever we lose them. And sure that happiness deserves to be valued above all others, which is left at our own disposal. So easy to be attained, that nothing can hinder or disappoint us in the pursuit; and so durable and certain, that nothing can impoverish us or cut off our enjoyment of it.

Thirdly and lastly. The *hearing and keeping of God's word* must needs be the greatest blessedness, because this, as St. Paul expresses it, *hath the promises both of this life, and that which is to come*. As well may we expect brightness without light, or heat without fire, as felicity without virtue; it is not in the nature of the thing, it is not in the wise ordinance and appointment of God. In the present life, *he that heareth Christ's sayings, and doeth them, is called the house built upon a rock*. Because this is the only thing that can keep him from being the sport of fortune, and secure his happiness against all the spite and uncertainty of a dangerous and unstable world. The winds may blow, and the waves beat and roar, but they only break themselves, and will never be able to move or wash him off from his firm foundation. And for the next world, all our hopes turn upon this and such like gracious declarations, *He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall never come into condemnation, but is passed from death unto life*. That the blessed Virgin is honourable among the saints above, the Christian church hath always thought it reasonable to believe. But the cause of all this honour by all who have thought wisely of the matter, is not imputed to the bearing our Saviour, in which she was purely passive, but in that innocence and piety which was her own act, and rendered her meet to be chosen for the mother of God.

All I shall add upon this occasion is a serious exhortation, that men would learn from hence where their happiness lies, and pursue it accordingly. That they would consider the honours due to virtue and goodness, and secure these to themselves. How should we despise the mean and trifling advantages of this present world in comparison of this only true and valuable one! Or, if we will still be fond of greatness and wealth and places of authority, let us not suffer our eyes to be dazzled with a false and empty show, but covet that which is substantial honour. And where this is to be had the wise son of Sirach

hath instructed us: *'Among brethren he that is chief is honourable, so are they that fear the Lord in his eyes. Whether a man be rich, noble, or poor, their glory is the fear of the Lord. Great men and judges and potentates shall be honoured, yet is there none of them greater than he that feareth the Lord.* If we will still admire a noble descent, and value ourselves upon great families, and being allied to royal blood; let us at least improve this vanity by turning our eyes another way, and take care to contract the closest relation to the King of kings. For the Lord of lords and the supreme Prince of heaven and earth hath said it, that *'whosoever does the will of his Father, the same is his brother and sister and mother.* O incomprehensible honour of faith and obedience! O blessed consanguinity! To be born of God, and to bear and bring forth the Lord Jesus in our hearts. To express his image in every thought and word and action; and to be ourselves conformed to him, partakers of his holiness and his crown. For the being thus his brethren and children of God is no empty honour, no swelling sounding name, but gives a sure title to his royalties and possessions too. **For if sons, then are we heirs; heirs of God, and coheirs with Christ; inheritors of a kingdom, a kingdom not like the perishing ones that so dazzle our eyes here upon earth, but one unspeakably happy and full of glory, that fadeth not away for ever in the heavens.*

THE FOURTH SUNDAY IN LENT.

THE COLLECT.

GRANT, we beseech thee, Almighty God, that we, who for our evil deeds do worthily deserve to be punished, by the comfort of thy grace may mercifully be relieved; through our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

THE EPISTLE. Galat. iv. 21.

21 *Tell me, ye that desire to be under the law, do ye not hear the law?* 21. You that are so zealous for the law will do well at least to attend to the arguments which even the law furnishes for the point I am debating.

22 *For it is written, that Abraham had two sons, the one by a bondmaid, the other by a freewoman.* 22, 23. Now there you find that Abraham had two sons, of mothers of different conditions; and the manner of his having them was different. For the bondwo-

23 *But he who was of the bondwoman was born after the flesh; but he of the freewoman was by promise.*

[†] Eccles. x. 20, 22, 24.

^u Mat. xii. 50.

^{*} Rom. viii. 17.

man's son was, like common children, the effect of natural vigour: but the freewoman's son was promised as an extraordinary blessing, to persons naturally incapable of having any.

24 *Which things are an allegory: for these are the two covenants; the one from the mount Sinai, which gendereth to bondage, which is Agar.*

25 *For this Agar is mount Sinai in Arabia, and answereth to Jerusalem which now is, and is in bondage with her children.*

language of that country bearing the same name,) is signified by Agar, whose children (as their mother was) are bondservants: and thus it agrees with the present Jerusalem on earth, and the servile condition of the Jews.

26 *But Jerusalem which is above is free, which is the mother of us all.*

27 *For it is written, Rejoice, thou barren that bearest not; break forth and cry, thou that travailest not: for the desolate hath many more children than she which hath an husband.*

foreseeing calls upon her, notwithstanding her former barrenness, to rejoice in a family larger than others that bore sooner could boast of.

28 *Now we, brethren, as Isaac was, are the children of promise.*

by Isaac, and owe our spiritual birth to the promise and free grace of God.

29 *But as then he that was born after the flesh persecuted him that was born after the Spirit, even so it is now.*

disposition and behaviour of Ishmael, in vexing the Christians, as he did Isaac.

30 *Nevertheless what saith the scripture? Cast out the bondwoman and her son: for the son of the bondwoman shall not be heir with the son of the freewoman.*

their own works: while we, who depend on the promise of God, and expect to be justified by the evangelical covenant, not the legal, shall be the only heirs.

31 *So then, brethren, we are not children of the bondwoman, but of the free.*

and consequently, how far we Christians are from any obligation to that law of Moses, which would destroy our free condition, and disparage the title our birth gives us.

24, 25. Now under this historical there is a mystical meaning. For the two covenants are typified by these two mothers. The law given in Sinai, a place out of the land of promise, (fitly resembled by Agar, as in the

language of that country bearing the same name,) is signified by Agar, whose children (as their mother was) are bondservants: and thus it agrees with the present Jerusalem on earth, and the servile condition of the Jews.

26, 27. But the heavenly Jerusalem, resembled by Sa-

rah, is free: from hence the other covenant came, and this is the mother of Christians every where. The numbers of whose children Isaiah

foreseeing calls upon her, notwithstanding her former barrenness, to rejoice in a family larger than others that bore sooner could boast of.

28. We therefore of the Christian church were figured

by Isaac, and owe our spiritual birth to the promise and free grace of God.

29. Nor are the Jews wanting to carry on the allegory, but resemble the

disposition and behaviour of Ishmael, in vexing the Christians, as he did Isaac.

30. And at the last their fate shall be his too, to be cast out from that inheritance they would arrogate to

their own works: while we, who depend on the promise of God, and expect to be justified by the evangelical covenant, not the legal, shall be the only heirs.

31. You see then how these things belong to us;

and consequently, how far we Christians are from any obligation to that law of Moses, which would destroy our free condition, and disparage the title our birth gives us.

COMMENT.

THE principal design of this Epistle to the Galatians was to root out some false notions, infused into them by their new teachers, concerning the necessity of still adhering to the law of Moses. In confutation whereof, after having insisted on several topics, with regard to the nature and proper use of that law, and the conditions and privileges of the gospel, as being far preferable to and now inconsistent with the observation of it; he does, in this portion of Scripture, propound one argument more, drawn from the writings of Moses himself; and therefore such as ought to weigh with them, whose intemperate and unseasonable zeal for the law delivered by him proved them to hold his authority in the highest veneration.

The stress laid on this argument is apparently so great as to call for a more particular explanation than a paraphrase can be supposed to allow it. My present endeavour shall therefore be, first, to enlarge a little upon some of the most material passages relating to this matter, and then to deduce some few inferences agreeable to the subject.

1. Now the apostle here, by grounding his argument upon a point of history, seems plainly to imply, that in some facts related by Moses the Jews ought not to rest in the letter and narration only: for that God intended the things then done to be figures of others which should be done hereafter; and, under the rehearsal of some memorable events read there, couched a mystical and very important meaning. In some particularly, wherein Abraham was concerned, his posterity, both carnal and spiritual, had an interest; and might be let into the reasons and manner of God's proceedings with them, by observing how he had dealt heretofore with him, their renowned father and common representative.

2. To this purpose the apostle takes notice of two sons born to that patriarch, as emblems of the Law and the Gospel; and by some circumstances relating to them, applied to these two covenants, he forms his reasoning, and confutes the vain pretences of the Mosaical institution being still obligatory, and the gospel terms being either inferior to it, or insufficient for salvation without it.

The first of these circumstances is the different condition of their respective mothers. The one a bondwoman, the other a freewoman: from whence follows the like difference in their children. For since it was a known maxim in law, that the children can have no quality descending to them but such as the parent had that bore them; and all that were born of servants in the family, the master had, by such birth, the same title to and dominion over, as he had to their parents by contract: it follows, that the son of this bondwoman must be no better than a servant. On the other hand, the freewoman being the master's wife, and mistress of the family, her son must in conformity be born in a state of liberty, such as gives him a title to the prerogatives of the firstborn and the inheritance of his father's fortunes, exclusive of all sons (though born before in time) begotten of any

other woman. The bondman born must be content with the treatment, the wages, the provisions suitable to his station; the heir may depend upon all the tenderness, the affection, the liberal education, the free access, the encouraging prospects and reversions due to the quality and succession he is born to.

3. These mothers, in the application the apostle hath acquainted us, are the *two covenants*, that is, the law of Moses and the gospel of Jesus Christ. Their children consequently are the persons living under those covenants. The bondwoman's, those under the law; the freewoman's, we under the gospel. How fitly so compared, will appear by attending to the characters given here of each.

The law is represented by Agar, a mother of servants only. This was given in Mount Sinai in Arabia, this answered to the Jerusalem that then was, and this gendereth to bondage.

Whether the name of that mountain (in the Arabian language called Hagar) were any part of the apostle's meaning in this allusion or not, there is a great deal to justify it upon other accounts. It is not without good reason that, after the gendering to bondage, the apostle takes particular notice that Sinai, represented by such a mother, is a mountain in Arabia. A place inhabited by the posterity of Agar, but withal a place at some distance from the land promised to Abraham and his seed; and by the very situation of it, intimating that the law issued and the covenant struck there could not indent for the blessings of the heavenly Canaan. As a bondwoman then could not produce free-children and heirs, who herself was not free (in the literal sense of this history); so neither (in the mystery and typical sense) could the law, given without the borders of Canaan, have any influence on or convey a title to the inheritance of heaven; because Arabia, in which that law was given, was not, and Canaan alone was, the figure and type of heaven.

Again, this Agar answers to Jerusalem that then was, and was in bondage with her children. The descendants of Hagar in Arabia were then under the Roman yoke; so were the Jews in Judæa. The Hagarens too observed circumcision as a federal rite; so did the Jews. In both respects the resemblance holds. And if we choose to understand him in the latter, no wonder the apostle charges it with *bondage*; since this is the very yoke which through this whole Epistle he exhorts his disciples to break; and asserts, as a most valuable instance of Christian liberty, the happiness of being exempted from it.

On the other hand, Sarah the *freewoman* is the gospel-covenant, and answers to Jerusalem above; a covenant that came down from heaven, and intimated God's good-liking by its promulgation, not only from the promised land, but from the place in that land which God delighted most in, confined his solemn worship to, kept his peculiar residence at, and placed his name and all the emblems of his mercy there. The persons under this covenant are as Isaac and his favourite posterity. They succeed into all the privileges of their mother, and to the inheritance of their father. A mother, like her type, fruitful in numerous descendants from her, though it were late ere she

began to bear; and notwithstanding the law was a dispensation antecedent to the gospel, (as Abraham had Ishmael several years before Isaac,) yet the proselytes to the gospel are many more than ever those to the law had been: (as Isaac's seed was more mighty than Ishmael's.) The prerogatives of this latter issue excel those of the first, as Ishmael's eldership gave him no precedence. And by the works of the law no flesh is justified, but all are saved by virtue of this second covenant; as Isaac's seed alone, but none of Ishmael's, inherited the promised land of Canaan.

Thus stands the allegory with regard to the first branch of it, which distinguishes the two sons of Abraham according to the different condition of their respective mothers. Before I proceed to the second, it will be expedient to interpose a few observations for the more effectual clearing and confirming some of the differences already mentioned between the covenants and persons, of which St. Paul declares those mothers and their children to have stood for figures.

1. We shall do well upon this occasion to observe wherein that servitude properly consisted, which the apostle charges the law of Moses with keeping men under; or, in other words, how that dispensation dealt with men in the quality of servants^a. Now that charge is made good by the nature of the services it enjoined, a burden of ceremonies in themselves of no value, a number of purifications which reached no farther than the cleansing of the body, a prohibition of gross and outward acts of sin, which prevented the scandal but not the guilt; as we employ our servants in the drudgery and meanest offices about the house, and, provided our business be despatched, are not solicitous from what principle and disposition our commands are executed. It is again made good by the nature of the rewards and punishments chosen for enforcing obedience to that law. A land flowing with milk and honey, victory over enemies, health to their bodies, increase to their families, prosperity in their fortunes, to compensate the trouble of their compliance with this law. Captivity and exile, scarcity and barrenness, adversity and anguish, crosses and disappointments, to avenge their violation and contempt of it. Blessings and curses, temporal and present, all of little value (in comparison) to men who carry immortal souls about them, and answering to these slender considerations we treat with servants for, a little wages paid down in hand, a tolerable subsistence from hand to mouth, but nothing of a settlement: corrections that follow immediately upon the fault, and a discipline suitable to the sordidness of their temper, which looks no farther than present smart and present profit. It is made good especially by that terror and perpetual consternation of mind, necessarily consequent upon a law rigorous in exacting works, without administering ability to perform them; sufficient to inform men of their guilt, but not providing remedies against it; threatening death to transgressions (as the condition of corrupt nature then stood) not to be avoided, and not giving any comfortable prospect of a deliver-

^a See Epistle for Sunday after Christmas.

ance: as slaves are contained in their duty by the scourge held over them, or made to labour in sight of the gibbet. Upon all which accounts it is that St. Paul most emphatically expresses the advantage of being freed from such a law, by saying that we *have not*, in this new covenant, *received the spirit of bondage again unto fear*.

The gospel, quite contrary, treats us as free-men and sons, because imposing upon us nothing unfit for men of generous descent and liberal education. It requires perfect and substantial holiness, virtues of intrinsic worth answerable to the dignity of human nature, such as adorn, exalt, and perfect it; rests not in the outward act, but carries these virtues into our most secret parts; enjoins purity of heart, uprightness of intention; secures our innocence by tearing up wickedness by the roots, makes us of a piece throughout, and sets us above the little trickish arts of dissimulation and constraint. These virtues it enforces with the noblest rewards, an eternity of joys, joys worthy of and agreeable to an intelligent and immortal spirit; the pleasures of knowledge, and goodness, and love; the knowledge and love of God and every desirable object: a recompense worth our waiting for, worth all we can do or endure to obtain it, because the recompense of sons; not our hire, but our portion, a glorious inheritance, an everlasting settlement. And lastly, it inspires such tender and filial affection, such a becoming sense of gratitude, such assured hope of being accepted in the Beloved, and considered when we do well, such firm persuasion of pardon and kind allowances when we fail and do amiss, such dependence upon grace and strength seconding our endeavours to do better, as fill and support us with inward complacencies, sweeten all our duty, take off the edge of all our sufferings, and render the so reasonable service of so good a Father *freedom, perfect freedom*.

Secondly, it is necessary, for a right understanding the apostle, to be rightly informed in what respect the law of Moses and the gospel are said to be two covenants. Strictly speaking, as the church of God, so likewise the covenant of God with that church, hath ever since the fall of our first parents been one and the same. The terms whereof on God's part are, forgiveness of sins, restoring mankind to holiness and immortality for the sake of his Son, and in view of his sacrifice and death for them: on man's part, belief in that Son, dependence upon that sacrifice, repentance for past offences, and sincere obedience for the future. Thus did this (truly called the second) covenant repair the breaches of that first, which promised immortality to unsinning obedience, made with Adam in the time of his innocence, but broken by him, and impossible to be discharged by any other man; since all descending from him (after his crime) partake in his frailty and corruption.

The foundation then of all the comfort resulting from this covenant is the redemption of the world by the death of Christ. The promises made to Abraham and the patriarchs were *confirmed in Christ*; the Spirit speaking by the prophets was the *spirit of Christ*; nay, even

before the flood, it was Christ that preached to the old world, *while the ark was preparing in the days of Noah*. In this respect principally it seems to be, that the author to the Hebrews styles him *Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever*¹. So that these covenants (the law and the gospel) are not two, with respect to the substance and principal intent of them, but only in regard of the different administration, and the terms upon which it pleased God at certain periods to apply and confer that general promise of salvation. The promises of the gospel indeed and the covenant of it are declared better than that of the law, as they are propounded with greater clearness, confirmed with stronger evidence, and are in part already accomplished. For this hath brought that *life and immortality to light*, of which mankind before had but dark and doubtful expectations: this hath taught us in express terms what the law taught in shadows and types; with an obscurity under which carnal minds (who, because they best like, are not disposed to look beyond the temporal) seldom discerned the spiritual and heavenly blessings to be understood: it changes the object of our faith, from a Messiah to come, to one already come; but still the Messiah is the salvation, still the joys of heaven the reward, still virtue and piety and faith the conditions of attaining it; whether the simpler worship of the patriarchs, or the rites of the Mosaical law, or the faith and sacraments of the gospel disburdened of those rites, were the method which Almighty God in his wisdom saw fit each in their proper season to prescribe, as a necessary qualification for them at that time. The short is this; that although for wise reasons God hath changed the instances in which he would be served, as to the outward testimonies of their belief in and love and reverence for him; and in this sense, the law and the gospel are two covenants; yet that faith and love and reverence were always indispensable duties of religion on our part of the covenant; the remission of sins by Jesus Christ and a blessed immortality always continued the same on his part. And thus the law and gospel, which, as to their difference in modes and circumstances, were perfectly distinct, yet in effect, and as to the essentials of obedience and moral virtue, the reward aimed at and the ground of their hopes, were one and the same covenant.

3. The last particular, duly attended to, will help us rightly to interpret those many disparaging and seemingly hard reflections cast upon the law by St. Paul, in the management of his controversy against them who still stood peremptory for the necessity of observing it. Now these are not meant of the moral law, which was a branch of natural, and still remains part of the Christian religion; nor of the ceremonial law, so far as any of the rites enjoined there were understood to typify and to be accepted for the relation they bore to Christ; for in this sense that law too belonged to the gospel. But they are all intended of that ritual law, as altogether separate from and independent on the gospel. In this sense the Jews took it, who

denied altogether and persecuted the *faith of Jesus*. So allowing salvation to be owing in no degree to him, but altogether to the law. In this the Judaizing Christians took it also, who allowed faith in Jesus Christ to be a partial cause of salvation, but not sufficient and effectual without the works of the law. Both which this apostle opposes, by proving Jesus Christ against the Jews, and Jesus Christ alone against the Judaizing Christians, to be the author and efficient cause, and repentance and faith in him the conditional cause of our salvation. He shews that the law thus taken was not capable of justifying the observers of it at any time, but that at this time it added to their guilt. The former, because all its efficacy depended upon a representation of Christ to come; the latter, because the continuing to observe it as necessary was a constructive denial, at least a disparagement, of Christ already come. And thus it is (when set in contradistinction from and opposition to the gospel and faith), and not otherwise, that the law and works are exposed, not only as not justifying, but even killing those that repose their confidence in them.

II. The other remarkable circumstance which offers itself to our consideration concerning the two sons of Abraham relates to the manner of their birth, and is contained in those words, ver. 23, *But he who was of the bondswoman was born after the flesh; but he of the free-woman was by promise*. In the production of Ishmael there was only the same common providence which concurs with and gives success to natural causes in ordinary generations. A mother in the vigour of her age, and a father not yet absolutely decayed, required no more. But in that of Isaac every thing was miraculous. For a mother *dead* to all these purposes, and (to use this apostle's expression elsewhere) *a father as good as dead*, to become fruitful, was an effect altogether above and out of the power of nature. This argued an immediate operation of Omnipotence, and it is urged as a noble instance of faith to believe the promise of God. And Isaac is therefore called the child of promise, because foretold as the chosen seed, and given in a manner so wonderful, that nothing less than the power and truth of God could have justified the hopes of him in persons so disabled.

Thus, in proportion, they whom these sons represent do likewise differ from each other. Such as depend upon the law, like him born by natural means, expecting pardon of their sins and the salvation of their souls by works of their own performance. But *we*, who, *as Isaac was, are the children of promise*, ascribe these blessings to a higher hand, acknowledge our own impotence and deadness, and thankfully adore the truth, the power, the goodness of God, who, *not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy in Jesus Christ hath saved us*, by methods astonishing and supernatural; by the death of his own beloved Son, by the renewing of his own blessed Spirit, and by faith in the merits of another.

And as in the manner, so in the privileges of this birth, the resemblance holds between Isaac and the Christian church. The Jews, like

Ishmael, were rejected, as St. Paul observes, because they sought righteousness by the works of the law; the Christians attain to it and to all the prerogatives of this inheritance, because seeking them by faith. That principle by which in all ages men were acceptable to God, as the author to the Hebrews proves at large, by instances of the most renowned worthies both before and under the law. An argument, that the gospel hath not introduced any new condition of salvation in general; but that, as the virtue of our Lord's sacrifice had a retrospect, so faith was the instrument of applying it, to the persons who lived before the actual oblation of it made upon the cross.

So good reason had St. Paul to dissuade his Galatians from returning to the observance of the law; this being, in effect, to exchange freedom for bondage, to put off the character of sons, and degrade themselves into servants; to quit a certain and indisputable title to, and take up an empty pretence, which never did, never can qualify any man for the inheritance.

Thus much for the allegory before us, and the argument built upon it. I just mention an inference or two naturally arising from this discourse.

1. First then, the manner of St. Paul's arguing here, from an allegory fixed upon an historical passage of the Old Testament, can be no rule to us for using such liberties of allegorizing Scripture at pleasure. I have upon another occasion offered some reasons which to me make it probable that the Jews were not insensible of God's design^x, to order many memorable events in the fortunes of some of their ancestors so as to become typical of things afterwards to be accomplished upon the Christian church. Whether they had any traditions directing them in what cases this was done, and consequently, which of those events might be upon principles of their own fairly argued from, is matter of dispute. But be that as it will, the apostle here had the same divine Spirit to secure him from any error in the interpretation which those first penmen had to direct them in the narration. And the demonstration he gave of that Spirit renders his authority in the one case equal to that of Moses in the other. But this is by no means our condition; and therefore it becomes us to proceed with more modesty and restraint. Where the analogy of faith is preserved, a prudent use of this kind is allowable in the way of exhortation or moral reflection. But in the way of argument for establishing any point of doctrine, it is requisite we keep close to the plain and natural sense of the text, and not wantonly sport it in ambiguous niceties and affected allusions.

2. From the difference illustrated here between the legal and evangelical covenant, it were seasonable to exhort men that they would consider the dignity and privilege of their high calling, and serve God upon principles and with a disposition of mind worthy of the near and honourable relation they bear to him¹. But in this I am prevented by a former discourse.

^x Boyle Lectures, 1701.

¹ Epistle for Sunday after Christmas.

3. And therefore I only add, lastly, that we must take good heed not to pervert the arguments urged by St. Paul against the works of the law, to the prejudice or disparagement of good works in general. The former are only such works as made up the ceremonial law, and those are abolished by the death of Christ and the promulgation of his gospel. The latter neither begun with nor expired with that law, but are moral duties of eternal obligation. To say we are not justified by the works of either sort, but by faith only, implies, that God forgives men's past sins, and admits them into covenant, without any such previous considerations. But to say that men may be saved without good works, infers that they are not bound to do any such after their admission into that covenant. And this contradicts the whole strain and evacuates all the precepts of the gospel. So wide a distance is there between justification, in St. Paul's sense, and salvation, or that final justification, which is peculiar to the day of judgment.

Let us therefore, as this apostle elsewhere advises, learn to *maintain good works*, and to *adorn our profession* by them. For this is to answer the character of our sonship, to be followers of our Father which is in heaven, and to promote the true end of this holy season. But let all this be done with profound humility, and many mortifying remembrances of our own frailties; and even in our best estate and most exalted devotions, let us approach the throne of grace with a modesty of which our church in the collect for this day hath set us a pattern; beseeching of God that *we, who for our evil deeds do worthily deserve to be punished, by the comfort of his grace may mercifully be relieved; through Jesus Christ our Lord.* Amen.

THE GOSPEL. St. John vi. 1.

1 *Jesus went over the sea of Galilee, which is the sea of Tiberias.* 1. Jesus, upon hearing that John was put to death, retired with his disciples by ship over the sea, and went to a desert place belonging to the city of Bethsaida, that they might get a little rest from the crowds. (See Mark vi. 31; Luke ix. 10)

2 *And a great multitude followed him, because they saw his miracles which he did on them that were diseased.* 2. But the people followed him on foot, round about by land, some to hear him and others to be healed by him. (Luke ix. 11.)

3 *And Jesus went up into a mountain, and there he sat with his disciples.*

4 *And the passover, a feast of the Jews, was nigh.* 4. These were more numerous now, because going from all parts up to the passover.

5 *When Jesus then lifted up his eyes, and saw a great company come unto him,* 5, 6. Jesus, (when he had discoursed to them of the

he saith unto Philip, *Whence shall we buy bread, that these may eat?*

6 *And this he said to prove him: for he himself knew what he would do.*

7 *Philip answered him, Two hundred pennyworth of bread is not sufficient for them, that every one of them may take a little.*

8 *One of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, saith unto him,*

9 *There is a lad here, which hath five barley loaves, and two small fishes: but what are they among so many?*

with some sustenance out of the neighbouring villages; he answers, that they should give them to eat; and asked Philip what way he could think of for supplying them on this occasion. Compare Mark vi. 35, 36, 37. Then he inquired what stock of provisions they had, Mark vi. 38. Upon examination Andrew, &c.

10 *And Jesus said, Make the men sit down. Now there was much grass in the place. So the men sat down, in number about five thousand.*

pany; and to put themselves into
11 *And Jesus took the loaves; and when he had given thanks, he distributed to the disciples, and the disciples to them that were set down; and likewise of the fishes as much as they would.*

12 *When they were filled, he said unto his disciples, Gather up the fragments that remain, that nothing be lost.*

13 *Therefore they gathered them together, and filled twelve baskets with the fragments of the five barley loaves, which remained over and above unto them that had eaten.*

14 *Then those men, when they had seen the miracle that Jesus did, said, This is of a truth that prophet that should come into the world.*
that saw it that Jesus was indeed the Messiah, the eminent prophet foretold by Moses.

kingdom of God, and healed their sick, Luke ix. 11; Matt. xiv. 14.) was minded to make trial of Philip's faith.

8, 9. Therefore when it was evening, and his disciples desired him to dismiss the multitudes, that they might provide themselves with some sustenance out of the neighbouring villages; he answers, that they should give them to eat; and asked Philip what way he could think of for supplying them on this occasion. Compare Mark vi. 35, 36, 37. Then he inquired what stock of provisions they had, Mark vi. 38. Upon examination Andrew, &c.
10. Jesus hereupon commands the people to be conveniently ranked by hundreds and fifties in a common usual posture of eating.

14. This miracle, like that of feeding the Israelites with manna heretofore in the wilderness, convinced those

COMMENT.

Our Saviour's feeding vast multitudes of people with a very small quantity of provisions, is, it seems, in the opinion of the church, a miracle of such consequence, as to deserve three public readings in

the course of the Gospels every yearⁿ. It is true there is some difference in the circumstances of the actions related. The time, the place, the number of the eaters, and that of the baskets of fragments left behind, do differ. But the substance, the miraculous operation, and the uses proper to be made of it, are the same, and common to both. The Scripture taken from St. Mark mentions *four thousand* fed with *seven loaves* and a *few small fishes*^o: this from St. John, *five thousand* fed with *five barley-loaves* and *two small fishes*. That counts *seven baskets only*, this *twelve*, of fragments gathered after they had been satisfied. But it is evident, that both *four* and *five thousand* so fed is an effect infinitely above the power of natural causes and agents; and so is the remainder of *seven* or of *twelve* baskets, be the measure of those baskets what it will. The considerations therefore, on which I design to insist, and the practical improvements to be made of them, belonging by parity of reason to each account, I shall think both sufficiently treated of, under the three following observations, and the inferences resulting from them:

I. First, our Lord's behaviour before this feeding and distribution, taken notice of ver. 11. *when he had given thanks, he distributed* &c. or, as St. Matthew somewhat more expressly, *Looking up to heaven, he blessed, and brake, and gave, &c.*

II. Secondly, the satisfying so many with so small a store; *He distributed of the loaves to his disciples, and his disciples to the multitude, and likewise of the fishes as much as they would.*

III. Thirdly, the saving of the remainders, ver. 12 and 13. Upon these particulars I shall endeavour to say something that may be of use to us in our own respective circumstances.

I. I begin with our Lord's behaviour before this feeding and distribution, called by the evangelists, *blessing*, and *giving of thanks*, by the former, some interpreters understand the multiplying virtue which he then commanded down upon the sustenance they were about to take; and that marvellous increase in the hands of the distributors, whereby it became a repast sufficient for so vast a multitude. Others, that he thus gave thanks to his Father for, and begged his blessing upon it, for the wholesome nourishment of those bodies which were to be fed with it. And these notions seem absolutely necessary to that passage of St. Mark, who, after the mention of his *giving thanks*, adds, that he *blessed a few small fishes, and commanded to set them also before the people.*

It is enough to warrant the indifferent use of these two words, that the forms of address to Almighty God, upon the use of his gifts for our refreshment, have usually been mixed, and consist partly of praises and partly of petitions. Accordingly, we expressly call this action *giving thanks, saying grace, blessing the table, craving a blessing*, and the like. Because the end of such devotions is manifestly twofold. Both to render our acknowledgments to God for his liberality;

ⁿ Fourth Sunday in Lent; Seventh and Twenty-fifth Sundays after Trinity. ^o Seventh Sunday after Trinity; Mark viii. 5, 8, 9.

^p Matt. xiv. 19.

^q Chap. viii. 12.

and also to beg that it may be sanctified to us, by tending to promote all those good purposes which such bounty is intended to serve and advance. The whole indeed seems to have been exactly described by St. Paul, when, condemning the erroneous superstition of some who preached up the distinction of meats, he declares the lawfulness of all, and that the danger lay not so much in the kinds eaten as in the manner of eating. *Every creature of God (says he) is good, and nothing to be refused, if it be received with thanksgiving: for it is sanctified by the word of God, and by prayer.*

Hence it seems evident, that a secret sense of God's goodness upon such occasions is by no means enough; but that it is expected men should make solemn and outward expressions of it when they receive his creatures for their support; that this is a service and homage not only due to him, but profitable to themselves. The creatures are his, and therefore to be *received with thanksgiving*: but the *sanctifying* those creatures to man's use, and rendering that which is *good* in its own nature serviceable and advantageous to the party receiving, this depends upon the *word*, or particular blessing, of the Creator; and therefore it is our part to draw down that *word* by *prayer*.

This is to eat and drink like men and Christians, when we perform an act of worship, which appears to have had a place even in natural religion, and the practice of heathens themselves: which was certainly observed by the Jews; which St. Paul would not omit in all the confusion of a storm and shipwreck, which we have several instances of in our Saviour^s; which here he performed with great seriousness and zeal, thus teaching us, when *looking up to heaven*, that *the eyes of all* ought, in the most literal sense, to *wait* upon that Lord *who gives them their meat in due season*.

And what part of religion can be better contrived to keep up a constant awe and reverence of God in our minds? which are too apt, but will scarce find it possible to forget him, when accustomed to call upon his name at every supply of those natural appetites and necessities, which cannot but of course refresh our memories very often. What can more effectually humble us with a just sense of our own precarious and depending condition? What more dispose men to use his gifts moderately, to entertain them thankfully, to be content with their portion if it be little, to impart of their abundance if it be much; to compassionate those who want the same comforts, to recollect that they are stewards, and that their orders are, to *give freely of what they have received freely*? What, lastly, can be more likely to sanctify, to enlarge and multiply our blessings, than so decent, so public, so devout, so humble a testimony of our great Benefactor's goodness?

II. The second thing I proposed to consider on this occasion is the satisfying so many with so small a store. And here I might observe the zeal of these multitudes, the nature of that refreshment they were provided with, the quantity, which only was a present meal, when they were ready to faint; all which may assure good men that

¹ 1 Tim. iv. 4, 5.
Luke xxiv. 30.

² Drusius on 1 Sam. ix. 13; Acts xxvii. 35; Matt. xiv. 19. xv. 36;

God will provide, by some way they know not of, supplies for those wants which they are content to undergo in pursuance of their duty; that necessities they may depend upon him for, but if he give more, all that is over-measure. But at present I rather choose to insist upon a reflection which St. Augustine hath pointed out to me, and such as is of universal usefulness and concern.

It is, that this feeding of so vast a multitude by a method altogether extraordinary and miraculous should be used as a seasonable hint for the consideration of and thanks due for that bounteous providence of God, which every day feeds numbers infinitely greater in a very wonderful though ordinary manner. For what proportion do five thousand men bear to those numberless kindreds and countries that constantly subsist upon his liberality? What is this one marvellous enlargement of five loaves and two fishes, to the unconceivable productions of animals, the variety of plants and herbs, and other increase of the earth, and the many unknown ways by which *he opens his hand, and fills all things living with plenteousness*?

These operations do not indeed awaken our attention equally, because frequent and regular. They have their stated seasons and returns; and custom and order render them familiar. In some of them too the Divine wisdom sees fit to use the skill and labour of man as instruments. This takes off yet more from our wonder. For, so much ground as we see of attributing any effect to second causes, so much we usually find ourselves diverted from considering and honouring the First Cause. Yet would we but examine these matters curiously, there is not an instance among them all but yields a copious subject of astonishment as well as of praise.

To mention that with which the world seems best acquainted. No increase is more beneficial, none more promoted by our art and industry, than that of corn. But how prodigious, how amazing is even this, if we stand to take a close and distinct view of it! The husbandman, it is true, tills and sows, but after all his toil and care, our Saviour's observation is most true, that *he casteth seed into the ground, which cometh up he knoweth not how*. He sees it keep its due seasons, and bring forth first the blade, then the ear, after that the full corn in the ear. He knows that *the year is crowned with the goodness of the Lord, and that his clouds drop fatness*; and feels, by the product, that he hath trusted his pains and expense, and all the hopes of both, in good hands; that there is one above who watches his treasure for him, and returns it with large interest; that he *sends the former and the latter rain*, and comforts his heart with the appointed weeks of harvest. And from hence he does, or he should, take continual occasions of thanking and reverencing Almighty God; since no profession can furnish more palpable demonstrations of his good providence. For this was the witness which St. Paul says ought to have convinced the grossest heathens, that *"God gave them rain from heaven, and fruitful seasons, filling their hearts with food and gladness."*

* Mark iv. 27, 28.

† Psalm lxx. 12.

u Acts xiv. 17.

But ought it not likewise to strike them with wonder and amazement? For, although we see this done perpetually, yet what account can we give of its being done? Can the wisest of us all tell how the sun darts his rays and conveys a prolific warmth into the bowels of the earth, how that genial heat kindles into fresh life that substance which the soil had putrified, how corruption and death become necessary to fruitfulness, and every field preaches our own resurrection? For though reason cannot, yet experience does make it undeniably plain, that *what we sow is not quickened, except it die: and that which we sow, we sow not that body that shall be, but bare grain: but God giveth it a body as it hath pleased him, and to every seed his own body.*

This is what we call natural, because it proceeds by method and rule, and in a series of causes. But if we trace each of these to its first head, there is no less demonstration of infinite power and wisdom in this increase, than in that which in the scripture now at hand we distinguish as miraculous, because it was extraordinary and uncommon. Nay, I had almost said, the demonstration I am speaking of is greater. For when a miracle is wrought, nature is set aside, and its process superseded; the thing is done at once, in an instant, and at an heat. But in that which we call nature, providence acts by inferior causes, and some of those free ones too. And albeit the whole goes on leisurcly, and makes less vigorous impressions upon the senses; the multiplicity however of those causes what wisdom must it require to direct, what power to influence and invigorate, what steady management to keep them uniform! So that this is, in effect, a long succession of wonders; a chain, in which if one link be broken or displaced, the whole falls to pieces. And the links of this chain are the variations of every day in the whole year. Thus every furrow in our fields is loaded with evidences of a Divine power: and not *five thousand* only, but millions of millions, to whom God gives meat in due season, are sustained by Omnipotence; and not one of them ever feeds at less expense than that of a wonder, nay, of an infinite train of wonders.

III. The last head I promised to speak to is, our blessed Master's care that the fragments remaining might be gathered up and put into baskets. For which, no doubt, this had been a sufficient reason, that those might prove both the reality of the miracle and the exceeding greatness of the increase. But in regard our Lord assigns another, when saying, *Gather up the fragments, that nothing be lost*; the proper use, I think, of this head is, thence to form a direction how to manage our substance to the best advantage, and so to approve ourselves charitable and kind, as at the same time not to be profuse and indiscreet. Jesus, it is true, by setting his whole store before the multitudes, hath left us a pattern of beneficence and largeness of heart. The provisions growing so prodigiously upon his hands, are an emblem and intimation of those unaccountable accessions, which we may sometimes observe to the fortunes of generous and merciful persons: and

by some passages of Scripture, an unwary reader might be led to think that in those actions there could be no excess, at least no possibility of offending by such excess. But yet the same Jesus would not that even *fragments* should be lost, and herein he hath shewed that all reserving for the future is not unlawful; that charity is very consistent with frugality, indeed not only that they may, but should go together. For God will be sure to make a mighty difference between the virtue and the specious extreme beyond it, between the liberal and the lavish man.

That every one is bound by the rules both of prudence and religion to moderate his expenses, keep within his own property, and retrench all superfluities unsuitable to his calling and condition, is too notorious to need a proof. That which the case before us seems rather to suggest, is good husbandry in not laying out even upon proper objects beyond such proportions as the circumstances of our affairs will allow. For although the poor be our care, yet are not they our only care. The justice of those demands which our families have upon us, I had occasion formerly to take notice of. But besides these, the casualties of life, the infirmities of age and sickness, are very lawful and reasonable restraints upon us. Our Saviour, it is confessed, commanded the young man in the gospel to *go and sell all he had, and give to the poor*. But this was done as a trial of his pretended perfection, a precept personal to him, not of universal obligation, nor to be drawn into example rashly and at all adventures. The primitive Christians also brought their goods into one common fund, from whence distribution was made as each of the brethren had need. But this is commended only as an act seasonable then, not for a standard of practice that should be perpetual. At this rate indeed our Saviour's declaration, that we shall *have the poor always with us*, could not hold true. So that all the inference resulting from these instances is, that men should be in a constant disposition of mind, most willingly to exchange the treasures of this life for those of a better, and to part even with their all when the service of God and the good of souls require it. But in ordinary cases, the exigencies of other people are so to be considered as that our own be not altogether overlooked; and while we help them, care must be taken not to rob and perfectly strip ourselves.

Again, the very consideration of the objects we would relieve makes this caution necessary. For the wants and distresses of our brethren are not of one day's production or continuance. Fresh objects worthy of our pity are perpetually presenting themselves; and therefore we should do ill to be so lavish upon one or a few, as thereby to fall under a disability of succouring the rest. That which is constantly a duty obliges us to such prudent reserves as may keep us in condition to perform it long and often, even as oft as fit occasions shall call for it at our hands. These reasons (to name no more) are sufficient to prove that men may and ought to proceed by a zeal tempered with

prudence, even in gifts of piety and charity; and not abandon their substance, and by laying out all in a heat, either cut off their own power of being charitable for the future, or so reduce it as to become objects of charity themselves. And therefore I shall close with a few short rules, in which the example of our Saviour may be serviceable for directing our disposals and our behaviour in this point.

We cannot but observe, that the multitudes now fed by him were in a place remote from all accommodations, ready to faint for hunger, driven to that necessity by following him so far and attending him so long, that they might reap the benefit of his miracles and his doctrine. Now, since the necessities of our brethren in want are by far more and greater than the liberality of the wealthiest and most openhanded man can possibly supply, it is absolutely necessary that we should give some distinction. Wherein we shall do well to imitate our Lord in the following particulars:

1. That we generally bestow our charity upon such as are least in a condition of sustaining themselves. For that which the desert was to these multitudes, the same in effect are old age, maimed limbs, long sickness, multitude of helpless children, and the calamities which more immediately and visibly come from the hand of God, to the poor in general. They disable them, I mean, from furnishing themselves by painful labour and honest industry, and in so doing they lay them at our doors and charge us with them. But as for them whom pride or profusion, sloth or vice, have reduced; them who continue poor, only because they will not take any trouble to be otherwise; the laws of God have not commanded, and those of men wisely discountenance, the same compassion for such. To them who make wandering and beggary a trade, and choose the shame but ease of that before an honest and laborious livelihood, the best and truest charity is what Solomon and our own laws have prescribed, *a scourge for the sluggard, and a rod for the fool's back*. Want then, involuntary want, is the proper recommendation to our pity and relief. And this is to be rated, not always according to what men stand in need of, but sometimes according to the circumstances from which they are fallen; not always according to what they endure, but often by their being more or less destitute of remedies and helps against it. This gives the widow and the fatherless, the outcast and the stranger, a double title to our pity, if their necessities be the same with other persons who yet have relations and friends to assist and take care of them.

2. These multitudes followed Christ for his miracles and his doctrine; and hence we may learn that those poor ought to have a preference who frequent and love the worship and service of God, and lead honest and orderly lives. If the image of God in man be the true ground of our charity, then they who are doubly like him are doubly worthy of our charity. And therefore great difference should be made between those lewd and scandalous wretches who deface and dishonour his likeness impressed upon their souls, and them who, by their virtues and such improvements as their circumstances are capable of, endeavour to resemble him more and more; to the similitude

of nature adding that better and more valuable one of goodness and grace.

3. Once more, this action of our Lord instructs us, that it suffices if our charity minister to men's necessities, without thinking itself obliged to provide either that which is superfluous at present, or so much as may arm them against future contingencies. It shews us too, that managery is an ornament and an advantage to our charity. And to this purpose that advice of St. Paul is highly commendable, that men would contrive their distributions so as to be regular and easy, by *laying up in store of that which God hath prospered them with*, as their affairs will permit. Thus would our alms be always in readiness, and the poor would have a separate purse. A fund, that by rising insensibly would be parted with less grudgingly: a tribute due for our successes, and a most reasonable return to Him from whom we receive our all, nay, who condescends to accept of part of his own again, as not only paid back but given to himself; and who will not fail, in his own time and way, to recompense it accordingly, either before or at the last great day of account.

THE FIFTH SUNDAY IN LENT.

THE COLLECT.

WE beseech thee, Almighty God, mercifully to look upon thy people; that by thy great goodness they may be governed and preserved evermore, both in body and soul; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen:

THE EPISTLE. Heb. ix. 11.

11 *Christ being come an high priest of good things to come, by a greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this building;* 11. Christ being made a high priest, by whose sacrifice and intercession, not temporal, but heavenly and eternal blessings are obtained; by a tabernacle more excellent than the Mosaical, even his holy body, conceived and born, not after the common manner, but by an operation of the Holy Ghost, miraculous and divine:

12 *Neither by the blood of goats and calves, but by his own blood he entered in once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us.* 12. And not by the blood of bullocks and goats, by which the high priest on the day of atonement came into

the holy of holies; but by his own blood he entered into heaven, the true holy place: and that once for all, because the redemption he hath obtained for us is (not like the legal, valid for a year only, but) eternal.

13 *For if the blood of bulls and of goats, and the ashes of an heifer sprinkling the unclean, sanctifieth to the purifying of the flesh:*

of beasts heretofore, and the ashes made of a burnt red heifer, removed all legal pollutions, and restored the unclean, when sprinkled with them, to the service of the tabernacle. (Numb. xix.)

14 *How much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?*

(eternal Spirit,) when he offered himself a most unblemished sacrifice, be effectual to cleanse men's souls (as that of beasts did formerly their bodies) from the guilt of those sins that make liable to death, (as that other from pollutions contracted by dead bodies,) and qualify them for the acceptance of their service to God, (as that other admitted men to the communion of the sanctuary.)

15 *And for this cause he is the mediator of the new testament, that by means of death, for the redemption of the transgressions that were under the first testament, they which are called might receive the promise of eternal inheritance.*

the first legal covenant could not expiate, all who are admitted to and perform their part of it may receive the promise of immortality and happiness in heaven, their title to which is clear, their sins being thus atoned for and forgiven.

13. Nor is it strange that his blood should have so noble and lasting effects, to any who remember how that

14. Shall not then Christ's blood, (whose person is divine, and so his blood the blood of God (Acts xx. 28.)

by the unity of the same

most unblemished sacrifice, be effectual to cleanse men's souls (as that of beasts did formerly their bodies) from the guilt of those sins that make liable to death, (as that other from pollutions contracted by dead bodies,) and qualify them for the acceptance of their service to God, (as that other admitted men to the communion of the sanctuary.)

15. To this end (or by this blood) he hath sealed a new covenant between God and us, that so, in consideration of his death for the

expiation of sins, which the first legal covenant could not expiate, all who are admitted to and perform their part of it may receive the promise of immortality and happiness in heaven, their title to which is clear, their sins being thus atoned for and forgiven.

COMMENT.

THE preeminence of the evangelical above the legal covenant was asserted in the Epistle for the last Lord's day. The church now proceeds to confirm that assertion, by appointing one for this day which instances in some particulars wherein that preeminence consists. An argument carried on by some comparisons drawn from that tabernacle and the service of it, in which the glory of the Levitical dispensation principally lay.

I. The person officiating.

II. The place where he ministered.

III. The sacrifices offered.

IV. The ends and effects of those sacrifices.

These are the heads of the apostle's reasoning, and shall be so of my present discourse upon this subject.

I. The first preference given here to the gospel covenant regards

the person officiating in the Christian sacrifice. Those among the Jews were offered by the succession and posterity of Aaron, men in all points upon a level with their brethren, excepting that distinction God had put by the honour of devoting them to his altar, and by their ministry conveying his blessings to, and receiving the homage and acknowledgments due from, the body of his people. But still those blessings were, could be, no other than the economy they attended upon had indented for. Which, properly speaking, extended no farther than the privileges of communicating with God in the ordinances he had prescribed, and the mercies of an earthly Canaan, of which such communion, regularly observed, was made the condition and the pledge.

The same high office does our Jesus execute under the gospel dispensation, but (as the chapters foregoing have proved by several instances) to much greater advantage. He was not, like the Jewish high priests, taken from among men, not of the same common frailties and corruptions with those for whom he mediates: but is *holy and harmless, undefiled and separate from sinners*: he consequently needed not, like them, to offer for his own sins first, and then for the people's: he was therefore a successful sacrificer for his people's sins, because under no guilt of his own to render him obnoxious and require a sacrifice: he was not of the tribe of Levi, or the order of Aaron, whose priesthood was temporary, and the persons admitted to it mortal; but of the order of Melchizedech, of *a priesthood unchangeable*; in respect of its solemn institution confirmed by the oath of God; in respect also of the Priest himself, *who liveth for ever to make intercession for, and consequently is able to save to the uttermost, them that come to God by him*. Once more, he is an *high priest of good things to come*; not employed in a ministry whose rites and ordinances were, and derived their chief value from being, shadows and significations of a future and more perfect sacrifice; *a figure for the time present, and imposed on men until the time of reformation*: but his sacrifice was the substance of all those shadows, the great original of all those figures; and his ministry that *very reformation*, which was a dispensation lasting and perfect: lasting, because perfect, leaving no place for farther improvement. None was intended beyond it, none could be after it, because none could be above it. An high priest also of *good things to come*; as the effect and influence of his sacrifice reaches beyond this world, and all fading enjoyments of it; and secures us a right to spiritual advantages, to a blessed immortality, to regions of glory which all the pompous descriptions of the beauty, the plenty, the ever desirable quality, by which (their type) the earthly Canaan is at any time recommended, do but very poorly, very faintly resemble.

So manifestly are the odds on our side of the comparison in respect of the person mediating in each covenant. The Jews sons of Aaron, and Christ our high priest; theirs high priests of *a figure for the time then present*, ours an *high priest of good things to come*. Let us now follow St. Paul to the second branch of his comparison,

II. The place of ministration. Of this the beginning of the chapter acquaints us, that it consisted of two parts, used by the priest in religious worship. The first, called the ^dsanctuary, in which the priest accomplished the daily service of God: the second, into which the high priest alone went, and that but once every year, and then too not without blood, which he offered for himself, and for the errors of the people. But of Christ our high Priest it is said, that he ^eentered into the holy place once, once for all; by a greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this building.

Of this greater and more perfect tabernacle expositors have given these two senses:

1. Some understand heaven by it, in agreement with those other passages of this Epistle, which call the Jewish tabernacle the *'example and shadow of heavenly things*; and heaven the true tabernacle, which the Lord pitched and not man. Which declare that *to be the patterns of things in the heavens, this the heavenly things themselves*: which affirm, that Christ is not entered into the holy places made with hands, which are the figures of the true; but into heaven itself, there to appear in the presence of God for us. The importance of the place, taken thus, agrees with the Jewish notion likewise, that God intended the tabernacle for an emblem of the whole world. (whence some have thought that title, a ^bworldly sanctuary, to have been given it here;) the outward representing the earth and the sea, the inward, heaven. The former, as sensible and familiar, the latter, invisible, and as yet inaccessible to us. And thus our high Priest excels the Jewish, because offering the blood of expiation in that very heaven which the sanctuary on earth figured; in a holy place, not of human art and contrivance, but created by Divine power; in the real, and not the typical presence of God.

Others there are that interpret the words of Christ's body. Observing that the Scripture sometimes calls human bodies *tabernacles*, that this very epistle terms Christ's flesh the veil through which a passage is opened for us into the holiest; that St. John, speaking of the ^kincarnation of the Word, expresses it by pitching his tabernacle among us, or in our human nature; and says that thence his glory was conspicuous: and again, that our blessed Lord himself calls his own body *a temple*. Manifestly alluding by these to the Jewish tabernacle and temple, and glory of the Lord exhibiting himself thero. Strong confirmations these are of that presence, by which God dwelt thus among his people, being intended as a type of that real and visible presence by which, in the body of his incarnate Son, he actually dwelt with and exhibited himself to men: a rational account why the worship of God and men's acceptance in it should be confined to that place of his symbolical presence; because intimating that there is no name given unto men whereby they must be saved, but only the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, with whose human nature he is substantially present. And this sense will likewise correspond perfectly well with that character of this tabernacle, *not made with hands, that is to say, not of this build-*

^d Ver. 2, 6, 7. ^e Ver. 11, 12. ^f Heb. viii. 2, 5. ^g Ch. ix. 23, 24. ^h Ch. ix. 1.

ⁱ 2 Cor. v. 1; 2 Pet. i. 14; Heb. x. 19, 20. ^k John i. 14. ^l John ii. 19, 21.

ing; in regard of Christ's human nature not being brought into the world by human means, (which being *made with hands* often denotes,) nor in the ordinary way; but born of an unblemished virgin, and conceived by an almighty and immediate operation of the Holy Ghost. In all which respects this tabernacle too was *greater and more perfect than that under the law*; and by it, by the blood which thus became his, he entered into heaven, as the high priest heretofore entered into the holy place on earth. The manner of entering was thus far alike in both; but the blood they carried in by no means alike. Which brings us to the

III. Third consideration, upon which the preeminence of our high Priest is asserted in the scripture now at hand,—the difference of the sacrifices offered. Their high priest entered by *the blood of goats and calves*; ours with *his own blood*, and this *the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God*.

The plan upon which the apostle forms his argument in this Epistle, so far as the sacrifices of each dispensation are concerned, is that most solemn of all the Levitical services, the great day of atonement. The directions given by God for this, so far as affect the point under debate, are as follow. The high priest is commanded to kill and offer a bullock as a sin-offering for himself and his house; afterwards to take a censer full of coals from the altar, and his hands full of sweet incense, and to bring this within the veil, to make a cloud of smoke which might cover the mercy-seat; then to bring in of the blood of the bullock, and to sprinkle it upon and before the mercy-seat. Afterwards to do the same with the goat which by lot was that day to be slain. The method of proceeding is the same in both. The only difference is, that as the bullock was an atonement for the high priest and his house, the goat was a sin-offering for the whole body of the people. All which, and more upon the same occasion, not necessary to be mentioned here, we have at large in the sixteenth chapter of Leviticus.

Hence it is that the high priest is said to enter *into the holy place by the blood of goats and calves*: because he might not go in there at any time without blood; nor with the blood of any sacrifices but these; nor with that neither except on this occasion.

Meanwhile, how far are these creatures and their blood below the value of that of a man, but especially of an innocent man, such as Christ was! For that is meant by *offering himself to God without spot*. An allusion to that ordinance in the law which (as I had occasion to remark before) rendered all beasts wherein was any blemish incapable of being offered in sacrifice: but, yet more especially, how contemptible an expiation was the blood of these creatures in comparison of his *who offered himself through the eternal Spirit*, who was not only man but God; and, by taking our human into his Divine nature, hath rendered this sacrifice of merit invaluable, of efficacy unquestionable, of benefit unconceivable! So that in no regard does the glory of our

high Priest excel and eclipse the legal more eminently than in that which this passage sets before us as a

IV. Fourth difference between them,—the ends and effects of their respective sacrifices. The legal *sanctify to the purifying of the flesh; the blood of Christ purgeth the conscience from dead works.* The legal high priest entered into the holy place once a year; the evangelical *once in all.* The effect of Christ entering is a *Redemption of the transgressions that were under the first testament*; consequently, the first testament did not take away the transgressions even of its own time. Lastly, this is the noblest, and the peculiar excellence of our high priest, that he hath obtained *eternal redemption for us*, and that by means of his death *they that are called receive the promise of eternal inheritance.*

By all these characters is signified the weakness, the insufficiency of the Levitical sacrifice, and the power and efficacy of Christ's alone, for taking away the guilt and punishment of sin. The grounds of both would take up too much time to be considered now, and will be more seasonably enlarged upon *hereafter.* But in regard the apostle attributes some, though not an equal effect to the legal in the comparison at the thirteenth and fourteenth verses, I will endeavour to adjust that point, and then draw toward a conclusion of this discourse.

The law of Moses then may be considered either abstractedly and in its literal, or more extensively and in its mystical meaning. According to the former, its promises and threatenings are merely temporal, its ceremonies, conditions of attaining the one and eschewing the other; as the observance or neglect of them kept up or forfeited a right of communion in those ordinances. According to the latter, eternal benefits and punishments were implied under the expressions of temporal, and thus the outward ceremonies were types of and admonitions to inward virtues. We do not therefore, by calling these shadows and figures, take from them all manner of efficacy and influence upon the persons heretofore obliged by them; but allow them such as bears proportion to this twofold character in which they stood. The impurities contracted in violation of the law plainly drew on a double inconvenience: one, that the unclean incurred the wrath of God and the sentence of death here and hereafter; not only their bodies, but their consciences were defiled by acts which, in that state of things, were appointed terms of salvation and God's favour: the other, that as a mark of present disfavour they stood incapable of communion, either civil with their brethren, or religious with Almighty God.

Now the last of these inconveniences was directly and effectually taken off by those respective rites and sacrifices which the law prescribed in such cases. They were restored to the camp or the city, the tabernacle or the temple, to all the benefits and advantages expressly contracted for by that covenant. But as to the mystical and more valuable part, the purging of the conscience, delivering from death spiritual, and, as a consequence of sin forgiven, qualifying them for a possession of the heavenly Canaan; these were reserved for a nobler

^a Ver. 13, 14.

^c Ver. 12.

^d Ver. 15.

^e Ver. 12.

^f Ver. 15.

^g Epistle for the Wednesday before Easter, and Good Friday.

sacrifice; a blood better than that of goats and calves: yet still a blood, figured and represented by and virtually shed in theirs. Hence the apostle tells his Colossians, those ordinances *were a shadow of things to come, but the body is of Christ*. So far then as they contributed to the reconciliation of offenders, so far they did not work by any inherent and essential, but by a derived and relative power. The virtue and acceptance of the type was entirely owing to its antitype; for all the bloody sacrifices prefigured the *offering of the body of Jesus once for all*. Nay, even those temporal advantages which were actually saved to them or recovered by their sacrifices, were intended to typify such as are spiritual and eternal. So perfectly figurative was their whole economy, so industriously contrived for service and subordination to the gospel-dispensation; that, strictly speaking, the law was little else than the gospel typified, the gospel was the law explained and accomplished. And the difference between them is like that which distinguishes shadow from substance, clearness from obscurity, and prospect from possession.

I only add an earnest exhortation, that two expressions in the Epistle for this day may be heedfully attended to. The one, that *they who are called* (effectually so, by obeying that call) are the persons said to *receive the eternal inheritance*. The other, that the *blood of Christ purges our consciences from dead works to serve the living God*. By both is meant, that even such an high Priest, and such a sacrifice, will not save them who take no care to save themselves. But as the Jewish rites restored men to the temple, and capacitated them for frequenting religious worship, so the Christian expiation is an encouragement to, a comfort in, an assurance that we shall be accepted by our service; but by no means a dispensation from it. Were it not for this, our endeavours must be fruitless, and no wonder if we turn desperate; but the knowledge of an atonement made banishes our terrors, frees us from all that consternation and confusion which the sense of guilt and the fears of vengeance naturally create. This inspires life and vigour into our undertakings. For nothing is so powerful a motive to be *steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord*, as the being perfectly satisfied that *our labour is not in vain in the Lord*. And this is directly our case. Live without sins we could not; make satisfaction to the justice of God for our sins we could not; and therefore God hath done this for us, and without us, by providing himself a *Lamb that taketh away the sins of the world*. That which is left still upon our hands we cannot indeed do without God, but he hath promised to do this for us too; yet so to do it for us, as to do it with us and in us and by us. And *how shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation?* How ill do we answer the end of this sacrifice, which was to *purify a peculiar people, zealous of good works*, if we turn the grace of God into wantonness, and render it an occasion of security and wicked presumption! Let us remember, the design of our church was, by such a supporting

account of our high Priest and his sacrifice, to raise our spirits under those dejections into which our sorrow for sin is presumed at present to have sunk them; to bring us to the disposition of those honest debtors, who, the more they are forgiven, the more they love: and we know what judgment must needs be made, what proofs expected of that by him who hath said, *¶ If ye love me, keep my commandments.*

THE GOSPEL. St. John viii. 46.

46 *Jesus said, which of you convinceth me of sin? And if I say the truth, why do ye not believe me?*

47 *He that is of God heareth God's words: ye therefore hear them not, because ye are not of God.*

48 *Then answered the Jews, and said unto him, Say we not well that thou art a Samaritan, and hast a devil?*

49 *Jesus answered, I have not a devil; but I honour my Father, and ye do dishonour me.*

50 *And I seek not mine own glory: there is one that seeketh and judgeth.*
there is one who observes how I am treated, and will call it to account.

51 *Verily, verily, I say unto you, If a man keep my saying, he shall never see death.*

52 *Then said the Jews unto him, Now we know that thou hast a devil. Abraham is dead, and the prophets; and thou sayest, If a man keep my saying, he shall never taste of death.*

53 *Art thou greater than our father Abraham, which is dead? and the prophets are dead: whom makest thou thyself?*

54 *Jesus answered, If I honour myself, my honour is nothing: it is my Father that honoureth me: of whom ye say, that he is your God.*

55 *Yet ye have not known him; but I know him: and if I should say, I know him not, I shall be a liar like unto you: but I know him, and keep his saying.*

46. What sign of a false prophet can you charge me with?

48. Have we not reason to call thee a separatist, and enemy to our religion, a man can we say too bad of thee?

50. I do not covet honour, as false prophets do; but

51. By receiving my doctrine, I tell you, and by that only, can you escape dying eternally.

52. They, understanding him of temporal death, reply

54. For me to exalt myself were very vain and exceptionable, but my Father, even the God ye profess to

56 *Your father Abraham rejoiced to see my day : and he saw it, and was glad.* 56. Abraham with great joy saw by faith my then distant coming into the world, and that prospect was matter of great gladness to him.

57 *Then said the Jews unto him, Thou art not yet fifty years old, and hast thou seen Abraham ?*

58 *Jesus said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Before Abraham was, I am.* 58. I assure you, my being is of a standing much longer than Abraham, even from all eternity, and never had beginning.

59 *Then took they up stones to cast at him : but Jesus hid himself, and went out of the temple, going through the midst of them, and so passed by.* 59. At this the Jews, enraged, and thinking that saying blasphemous, were about in their zeal to stone him, the punishment usual for blasphemy, and sometimes by their zealots inflicted without any formal process or sentence of law.

COMMENT.

As the death of our blessed Saviour is the spring from whence all our hopes and confidences of happiness and mercy flow, and the end of his sufferings the benefit of wretched man ; so the manner of those sufferings is likewise adapted to our good. And if within these it be fit to comprehend, not the last black scene alone, but those many antecedent passages of his life in which he *endured the contradiction of sinners against himself*, the Gospel for this day may well deserve its place in our liturgy. Thus the church rises very gradually in the historical part, from opprobrious language, and a malicious but vain attempt upon that sacred life, to that violence which was permitted to take effect : in the instructive part, from a pattern of reproached and spited innocence, to one of faithfulness to the very death, and *resisting even unto blood*, when God and duty call. This I conceive the great design of, this the proper method for improving that scripture read in your ears this day. And therefore my work shall be, first, to represent our Saviour's deportment upon this occasion ; and then to instance in such particular virtues, deducible from thence, as would adorn our lives, if well observed, when it is our lot to fall under the like circumstances.

And first, we may, through the management of this whole affair, observe a divine prudence in restraining at some times and expressing at others the just indignation our Lord conceived at the malice and obstinacy of these wicked Jews. Of this we have a remarkable pattern in the return made to these words, *Thou art a Samaritan, and hast a devil*. The reproach of *Samaritan* was one of the last affronts at that time capable of being passed upon any man. It spoke him idolater and schismatic, and, according to the terms that people then stood upon with the Jews, every thing that was odious and despicable.

Yet all this is only answered by silence, as not worthy our Lord's notice. But the other part, of *having a devil*, would draw down scandal upon his doctrine, and weaken the authority of his preaching. And therefore this was fit, nay, it was necessary to be confuted. And upon that point he condescends to reason with them. Hence we may learn how to distinguish injuries, and how we should proportion our resentments according to the different sorts and consequences of them. Where the provocation is private, and terminates in ourselves, it is a mark of a great and Christian mind to put it up, or softly to reprove it. But where it reaches farther and wounds deeper, where truth and goodness are struck at through our side, silence is tameness there. For then the cause ceases to be our own. God's glory and the good of all mankind are concerned in the respect due to virtue and religion; and that, which is none of ours, we ought not to recede from, nor can we give it up without committing a fault. Well were it if this rule were duly thought on and punctually observed. Then we should see a stop put to profaneness, and all wicked raileries upon holy things. These would not with such a triumphant boldness be uttered, and esteemed a part of mirth and wit in conversation, if they were not as wickedly received and applauded. Men would not be so jealous of their own reputation, and at the same time so injurious to God's, as we find them to be. They would not, for every small, for every supposed affront, require blood, and execute a murderer's vengeance; and yet sport with the Majesty of heaven and his oracles, as if these were fit for nothing but to furnish matter for a keen and saucy jest: as if the holiness of the Most High might be prostituted to the most contumelious usage; while what the profligate wretches falsely call their own honour must be sacred and inviolable, and, like the ark of old, not touched but upon pain of death. So contradictory, it seems, are the notions some men now have of contemptuous treatment to those of our great Master, so different their deportment under it. He generously disdained the infamies levelled at himself, and his unspotted innocence gave him the advantage of doing it securely. Others, perhaps, are the more impatient of reproach, because guilt and self-condemnation give it a sting; they feel less concern for the vindicating one whom the most blasphemous falsehoods cannot hurt, than for themselves, whose impurities are already so foul and black as not to bear freedom and bold truths.

But, secondly, our Saviour's example here instructs us also how to proceed in that defence which God and religion require from us. For those very things which we may, nay which we are bound to vindicate, are not to be vindicated after every manner; but some order and proper measures are to be observed, even in the most lawful, the most necessary returns to those that abuse and traduce them. And for this, Christ's own words are a pattern sufficient, to as many as are content to consider and be guided by them. *Jesus answered, I have not a devil, but I honour my Father, and ye do dishonour me.* Wherein he only clears himself from their wicked suggestions, with all the mildness that became his character and the justice of his cause.

As in other the like occasions we find him returning cool reason to their rage, and barely exposing the absurdity, the impossibility of their charge against him, the inconsistency of his actions with their blasphemous thoughts: and even when the treachery of a disciple had done him the last injury, and given him the justest provocation, he chides his perfidiousness and ingratitude with this soft rebuke only, *Judas, betrayest thou the Son of man with a kiss?* So little countenance have we from his practice for that clamour and bitterness, that furious and wild passion to which men think themselves licensed, when their own or God's cause has drawn them into dispute. The spiteful recriminations, the industrious and studied abuses, and all the refined arts of railing and ridiculing, by which they endeavour to distinguish their parts or their zeal, may perhaps serve to recommend them to an ignorant or an ill-natured world; but surely these men *know not what spirit they are of*. They forget that this is the effect of pride and envy and contention; not any part of Christianity, not any resemblance of its meek, its divine Author; not any advantage to the truth, which, in the esteem of good people, rather suffers by such indecencies and indiscretions. For it is not without some difficulty that an argument can deliver itself from the aversions which unbecoming treatment and ungoverned passion raise against it. And most seasonable upon these occasions is that advice of St. James, *That even then, when we are swiftest to speak, we should be slow to wrath; remembering that the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God.*

Thirdly; from the mention of our Saviour's hiding himself in this Gospel, we may observe the lawfulness of avoiding danger and persecution. Which is indeed so agreeable to the first and fundamental principles of human nature, that it might seem impertinent and ridiculous to propose it; were it not, that some eminent patterns in antiquity are highly celebrated for embracing those cruelties and encountering those difficulties which it seems to have been in their power to have escaped. Nay, and this very Saviour, who hath left us an example of withdrawing from his enemies, and defeating their attempts at some times, did yet offer and yield himself up to their malice at another. So that the natural result of all this is, that there are some occasions in which the dangers that threaten us may fairly be declined; and others, wherein, without a breach of decency and duty, they cannot. Now, how to distinguish between these different cases, as it is of exceeding great importance, so it is what the example of our Saviour will do us no mighty service in. For to say that we must follow him, in endeavouring to rescue ourselves when it is not agreeable to the purpose of God that we should suffer, and we must bear the brunt of what he sends upon us when it is his purpose, would be to say nothing; for how shall we know that purpose of his? Christ indeed, who was privy to all the secrets of Providence, could tell distinctly which was his enemies' *hour and the power of darkness*: but we, who are not admitted into those mysterious counsels, must

content ourselves to make probable conjectures; and for the directing our judgments in them, these two rules may be of some significance to us:

First, whatever difficulty cannot be otherwise avoided than by violating our conscience, that, we are to conclude, God hath called us to suffer. For what the wise son of Sirach hath long ago observed, is universally true, that *he hath commanded no man to do wickedly, neither hath he given any man license to sin.* They are only the ignorant or the unbelieving that so much as put the question, whether a known deliberate crime be allowable for our own preservation. For, who that has been taught, who that heartily entertains the Gospel, can make doubt of it? Who that hears our Saviour rating the soul above the whole world would think, though it were life itself, (which, when rightly estimated, is but the prolonging and uncertain tenure for a short space, and that in a state of infinite change and trouble,) worth giving this in exchange for? Who must not see that an eternity of torments, at least a manifest hazard of them, is too hard a condition to close with upon any terms? Who that receives the promises of heaven with any becoming degree of assurance would grudge to keep the favour of God at the expense of all this world can boast of, and to trust him for the amends to be made in another? And if so, then it is certain a wilful sin must not buy our present ease and safety. For such a one is not consistent with God's favour, or a rational hope of eternal happiness. Nay, not only a sin in itself, but what a man thinks a sin; for though he should happen to be involved in unnecessary niceties, yet, so long as he thinks a thing sinful, although it be not really such, if he do it in that apprehension, God, who judges men by the integrity of their hearts, and not by the perfection of their understandings, will condemn that person as if it were a sin. And such it is to him. He violates his conscience who goes against the dictates and present light of it; he is an offender in the perverseness of his will, though he happen to be mistaken in the determination of his judgment. This therefore is the first rule: *Do nothing which your conscience tells you ought not to be done. And if there be no other choice left but sinning or suffering, you may be confident that he, who never commanded any man to sin, hath, in those circumstances, commanded every man to suffer.*

Secondly, the other rule is, that a man may use all lawful means for his own preservation; and where the regular use of these is successful, that may be accounted a case in which he was no way bound to suffer. For instance; if, in a controverted point, one uses the best means he can of informing himself, and, after diligent inquiry and honest impartial judging, he proceeds with the testimony of his own breast; this man is either right in his opinion, or under such a mistake as shall never be imputed to him for a crime. And therefore, whatever advantages of safety such a proceeding can give, he is fairly entitled to take the benefit of them. So again, a man may make

the best terms he can for himself with those that oppress or destroy him, provided he act without fraud, and break none of those restraints which the laws of God or of civil society have bound him up to. He may strive to deliver himself in distress; he may pray to God to deliver him; but both these must be done with a resigned spirit. And when we beg, with Christ, *that if it be possible this cup may be taken from us*, we must beg it, and we must endeavour it, with his reservation too, *nevertheless not ours, but our heavenly Father's will be done*. This submission is highly necessary, not only as it agrees with the condition of sons and servants and creatures, but as it may incline the favour of God to our relief. For why should we not suppose that he will proceed by the rules which love, honour, and the purest reason have fixed among men? that he will think it becoming his goodness to take those into his more peculiar care and protection, who are content to depend upon his pleasure, and resign all their affairs entirely up to his wise and gracious disposals? Hence it is, that to lawful means I add a regular use of those means; because anxious and inordinate desires do draw down, I doubt not, many sufferings and misfortunes, which would not otherwise have befallen men. And these, properly speaking, are troubles, not of God's creating, but their own.

Again, when I say a man may use all lawful means, I do not say that he is always bound to do it. There may be some instances wherein the Christian gallantry is concerned to distinguish itself. And heroes there have been, who, when they might have had it, would *not accept deliverance*, but have acquired to themselves a just and immortal renown for devoting their lives to the service of religion. But this is a point of perfection, and must be left to wisdom and a due consideration of circumstances to pronounce of. We may say of it as our Lord did of them that make themselves *eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven's sake*, *He that is able to receive it, let him receive it*. There may be cases when all the safe methods of preservation may be neglected; but he that seeks and uses them sins not in so doing. If God gives not success, then he is to sit down, and not doubt his mercy and a future reward: for that defeating his prayers and endeavours so far is a plain and loud call to suffer. But he who in bravery is more liberal of himself must be well advised. For as men may not be too tenacious, so neither may they be too profuse and lavish of life and the comforts of it, lest, besides these present hardships, they find at last an indiscreet zeal returned with a—*Who hath required these things at your hands?* Love indeed is apt and desirous to give over-measure where it can, to make up for the defects of one kind by double application in another. And sure, where God is the object of our love, it well becomes us to attempt this. But still, this must not be the effect of passion alone; prudence should temper and direct it. And where an affliction is chosen, which with a good conscience might have been avoided, as it may happen that the making such choice shall be

highly commendable, so it is certain they ought not to be condemned who choose a lawful safety, and therefore make it not.

Fourthly, we have already considered Christ as a pattern of meekness in not returning opprobrious language; let us also contemplate him as an example of not taking revenge. When an outrageous attempt was made upon his life, he satisfies himself with restraining their violence without inflicting those punishments which those men's wickedness deserved. And so ought we to content ourselves with those methods that are sufficient for our security, without proceeding to the utmost rigour and severity; even with the worst of enemies—even when they are in our power and lie at our mercy. It is *God to whom vengeance belongeth*, and men do but usurp it. But here you see the very person to whom it did of right belong tender in using that right, and rather choosing to soften his adversaries' hearts by patience and longsuffering, than to confound them by exerting his almighty power. Instructing us hereby what disposition they should be of, who pretend to be governed by his laws, and to live by the copy of his practice; that it is fit they pass by many and great provocations, and enough for them to consult their own safety without seeking the ruin of others. And this, if it were duly considered, would set bounds to men's fury, and shew them that, as they ought not in any case to do injuries, so they should not repay them neither in their own kind; *but cease from wrath, and let go displeasure*; for otherwise they will, in this sense too, be certainly *moved to do evil*.

Lastly, from this passage we may be certainly assured, that the sufferings and death of Christ were his own free voluntary act. The same Divine unseen force which held the hands of the men of Nazareth when they intended to cast him headlong down the brow of their hill, the same which evaded the Jews' present design to stone him, was ever ready, ever able to produce the same wonderful effects. We know it was so in the garden particularly. And the casting those down to the ground who then came to apprehend him, ought to have made them understand, that if he had not thought fit to check and withdraw it, neither their numbers nor their weapons could have prevailed to his prejudice. And this should inflame our love and our gratitude, that the many bitter things he endured for our sakes were not upon constraint, but choice: that he so signally proved the truth of those his own words, *no man taketh my life from me, but I lay it down of myself*: that he was barbarously treated and ignominiously murdered, because he would be so, and the *will of God was fulfilled* in this point, only because he was *content* and well pleased *to do it*. What remains then, but that, as this holy season requires, we meditate on this dying Redeemer with wonder; that we represent his willing passion to our souls in all those moving circumstances it is capable of; that we think nothing too much for him who was so liberal of ease, of reputation, of life for us; that we not only adore, but imitate that great example, who, *when he was reviled, reviled not again, when he*

suffered, he threatened not, but committed himself to God that judgeth righteously; that we make not wrongs of any sort mutual, but account it our generosity, our duty, to suffer ourselves to be outdone in this only instance of evil-doing. So observing the apostle's command, not to ^drender evil for evil, nor railing for railing; but contrariwise blessing; knowing that we are hereunto called, that we might inherit a blessing.

THE SUNDAY NEXT BEFORE EASTER.

THE COLLECT.

ALMIGHTY and everlasting God, who, of thy tender love towards mankind, hast sent thy only Son, our Saviour Jesus Christ, to take upon him our flesh, and to suffer death upon the cross^a, that all mankind should follow the example of his great humility; Mercifully grant, that we may both follow the example of his patience, and also be made partakers of his resurrection; through the same Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

THE EPISTLE. Philipp. ii. 5.

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| 5 <i>Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus:</i> | 5. With regard to the charity and mutual condescensions I am exhorting you to, make the humility and wonderful love of Jesus Christ your pattern. |
| 6 <i>Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God:</i> | 6. Who, though he was very God, and had taken to himself no more than belonged of right to him, in exerting all the glory and majesty of the Divine nature; yet did he not affect to appear in his native greatness and glory; |
| 7 <i>But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men:</i> | 7. But laid all that aside, did not disdain to live in human nature, not only as man, but as the meanest servant of God, and even of men, ministering to their wants; |
| 8 <i>And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.</i> | 8. And stooping so very low as to die, nay, to die the most painful and ignomini- |

^a 1 Pet. iii. 9. ^a Rom. viii. 32; 1 John iv. 9, 10; Phil. ii. 5, 8; 2 Tim. ii. 11, 12.

ous death, in obedience to his heavenly Father's will, and for the common benefit of mankind.

9 *Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name :*

10 *That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth ;*

11 *And that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.*

to his laws and government, promote the glory of God the Father, who delights to be honoured in the belief and obedience paid to his blessed Son and his gospel.

9, 10, 11. This unparalleled act of obedience God hath rewarded, by advancing his human nature to universal dominion. That the man Christ Jesus should now rule over and be adored by all creatures ; that all nations should acknowledge this King, and, by submitting

COMMENT.

The good effects which our church proposes to herself from this portion of scripture, we plainly learn from the Collect for the day to be humility and patience. The former to be expressed, by thinking no good offices beneath us, whereby we may contribute to the relief of our brethren in their sufferings ; the latter, by contentedness and constancy of mind in submitting to our own. In order to excite and establish these good dispositions in us, the Son of God and Saviour of the world is here set forth as our pattern. His love and condescension for our example, that we, so far as the difference of circumstances will allow, may not grudge to do as he hath done before us. His exaltation and reward is also mentioned for our encouragement, that we may depend upon the like being done to us in proportion which hath already been done to him, by way of recompense for such kind humiliation.

To treat this subject as we ought, it will be requisite to consider, first, what our Lord did, and how we are bound to imitate him. Secondly, what he received, and how this assures us of being rewarded like him.

1. A just sense of what our Lord did we never can have, without right notions concerning the dignity of his person. Which therefore the apostle hath here illustrated in terms that speak him very God and very man. The *form of God* as strongly inferring the former, as the *likeness and fashion of men* does the latter ; if we regard only the force of the expressions themselves. And as the whole course of his conversation, the things he did and suffered, living and dying, made uncontestable proof of the truth of his human nature, so, if we will allow St. Paul to argue with any consistence, his argument here overthrows the cavils usually objected to the truth of his Divine nature. For how can any taking the *likeness or fashion of men* de-

serve to be thought an *emptying* or *humbling* of himself, in a person who is no more than man? how can the government of the whole world be committed to or administered by a mere man^d? how can universal adoration become due to such a one? how can it agree with the design of the Christian religion to enjoin it, which aimed so directly at curing idolatrous mankind of their monstrous sin and folly; consisting properly in deifying men for their merits, and, in that ignorance of the one true God, *doing service to them which by nature are no gods*? But especially, how should a person deserve and obtain divine honours, as a reward for his unparalleled humility, and piety, and most exemplary meekness, who, if he were not real God, and yet *thought it not robbery to be equal with God*, (but suffered himself to be esteemed so, gave occasion from his own words to be thus esteemed, never warned those who took the occasion of any error or ill consequence in such an opinion,) was certainly the proudest and most presumptuous, the profanest and most detestable blasphemer? To them therefore who acknowledge our Lord's divinity, St. Paul's reasoning is just and very pressing. But to refer it to such condescensions as washing his disciples' feet, or even the indignities of his passion in a man only, renders it weak and trifling. The terms expressing this voluntary humiliation are an empty pomp in comparison, and such as then indeed, but only then, are full of significance and sound argument, when the perfection and majesty of Christ's Divine, and the impotence and vileness of our human nature are understood, for the height he came down from, to the depth he descended to.

Concerning this condescension, how marvellous it is in itself, and how forcible an engagement to humility and charity upon all who believe and reap the benefits of it, I did endeavour to make men sensible, when the church commemorated the blessing of our Lord *taking upon him the form of a servant, and being made in the likeness of men*. That yet more amazing humiliation of *becoming obedient unto death, even the death of the cross*, is matter more peculiarly suitable to the devotions of this day. And to it therefore I shall chiefly confine my discourse.

That crucifixion was of all deaths the most painful, the most opprobrious; a punishment reserved for the vilest of slaves and the heinouslest of malefactors, I can scarce suppose any of my readers ignorant. But if they be, the history of our dear Redeemer's sufferings, so particularly rehearsed, so often repeated in the service of this week, will not fail to possess them with right apprehensions of it. Waving therefore any farther enlargement at present, concerning that which our thoughts will for some succeeding days find themselves obliged to dwell upon; I apply myself immediately to the force and fitness of this example for producing, in the minds of all who consider it, those two dispositions already mentioned, which the Collect hath taught us at this time most seasonably to pray for.

1. The first of these is humility. Which it is evident no person, no instance, no action ever had, ever could have so direct a tendency

to promote. Well therefore might this Saviour invite men to *learn* of him, as being *meek and lowly*; since none was ever by nature so exalted, none by choice so abased: none could so empty himself of glory and power as he had done, even though his appearance upon earth had been made in all the riches and splendour of the greatest monarch that ever the world knew. But to render his goodness still more astonishing, *he came not to be ministered unto, but to minister*; thought the *giving of his own life a ransom* an office not too kind, and doing this in the quality of a servant and a criminal, a character not too mean for the sake of doing good.

The most fatal, and perhaps the corruption that sticks closest to our nature is pride. Fit therefore, above all others, to be particularly countermined, and quite beat out of countenance, by him who came into the world on purpose to correct our corruptions and to renew our nature. This vice consists in undue exaltations of ourselves, and, in consequence of these, disdain and contempt of others. But who are those selves? who those others? Lost and undone wretches all; lost and undone by the pride of the first, and so must have continued to eternity if not rescued by the humility of the second Adam. Do we then insist upon points and niceties of respect, upon place and precedence, with the utmost rigour, and cast away our own or invade another's life (murderers in both) upon the very jealousy of an affront? Do we neglect our poorer or in any respect meaner brethren, behold their miseries with indifference, hold them so far unworthy our pains or cost, or personal good offices, as scarce to allow them pity or regard? Nay but, O man! look upon the blessed Jesus. See the King of heaven making himself of no reputation, eating with the traitor, admitting his unfaithful kiss, mute before his judges, crucified with thieves. And all for them whom thou pursuest with revenge, or passest over with disdain. For thee, who thus reproachest the mercy by which thou art redeemed, the Lord that thus redeemed thee. Compare the indignities he submitted to, his unbounded charity, with thy angry resentments, scornful mien and hard-hearted coldness; and thou wilt soon perceive that the pride, the cruelty, the unconcernedness, which in any man is wicked, in the disciples of a crucified Master is perfectly absurd; a contradiction to the name of Christian, while thou wilt not let *the same mind be in thee which was in Christ Jesus*. It is true indeed, he hath far exceeded all that is possible for us to imitate. But the less proportion the utmost we can do bears to his amazing condescension for our sakes, the more must they for whom he stooped so low, if they think any thing too much for them for whom he likewise stooped so low, find their own narrowness of spirit and too delicate distinctions (where there is so little ground for such) reproached and condemned. And well it were if they would seriously reflect that this Saviour is one day to be their judge, if they would ask themselves how they shall then be able to stand before him, *who, though he was in the form of God, and thought it not robbery to be equal with God, yet humbled himself to the*

form of a servant, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.

2. The other virtue I would recommend is *patience*. Easy to be attained, when that last mentioned hath opened the way to it. For it is pride especially that disposes us to be angry and revengeful, fretful and querulous, uneasy with our fortunes and unthankful to Providence. Against all which evil diseases of the mind, what antidote more proper, more powerful, can we think of, than the example of the meek-suffering Jesus? If our quiet be disturbed, our possessions invaded, our persons insulted, our reputation aspersed by the malice of unreasonable wicked men; let us remember the perpetual vexations, the injuries and affronts, the lies and contradictions of sinners against himself, which through the whole course of his ministry he endured; but which, in the tragical scene this week presents us with, were outrageous beyond any comparison. If poverty or friendless trouble be our grievance, this resembles us but more to that Son of God who for our sakes became poor, subsisted on the pious bounty of his hearers and attendants; but in the hour of his enemies, and approach of danger, was betrayed by one, denied by another, and forsaken by all his disciples. If pain or sickness tempt us to repine, what gout, what stone, what melancholy can be more afflicting than the tortures he went through, the acute pangs of his dolorous crucifixion, and the cutting sorrows that wounded his soul even unto death? So far are our most sensible afflictions short of that weight of sorrow with which it pleased the Lord to bruise this Son of his love in the day of his fierce anger. But could we suppose them equal, yet doth not this make a mighty difference, and ought it not to compose our spirits to submission, that his obedience was an act perfectly free, his sufferings chosen for ours, and not his own benefit? But we, alas! as creatures, are entirely at the mercy of our common Master and Maker: as sinners, bound to acknowledge the righteousness of God in all that is come upon us; to lay our mouths in the dust, and recollect with the penitent thief, that *we indeed are justly under the same condemnation*. For this man did nothing amiss, but all that we receive, and a great deal more, God knows, than we can receive in this world, is but *the due reward of our evil deeds*. And doth a man complain for the punishment of his sin? Can impatience and discontent, and hard accusations of that providence which disposes all events, become one who in the course of justice hath brought misery upon himself by his own fault? Can he murmur at this which he suffers as a principal, when so much more was laid upon a proxy—an innocent and infinitely better proxy? Especially too, when the wisdom and goodness, no less than the justice of God have their part in every such dispensation. For as our blessed Master was in the bearing, so is he likewise a pattern in the reward of our afflictions. And, in that regard, the Epistle for the day does likewise call upon us to contemplate him in his exaltation. And therefore I proceed now to explain very briefly, in the

II. Second place, what our Lord received in recompense of his humility and patience, and how this assures us of being rewarded like him.

1. Of our Lord's recompense we have an account in the 9th, 10th, and 11th verses: which acquaint us that it consisted in an exceeding high exaltation of him, far above any the most excellent creatures; in making him the sovereign ruler of the whole world; in giving him a title to the humblest adoration; and in the publication of his gospel and his glories over the face of the whole earth.

But in what respect and capacity these honours were conferred on Christ is the main point to be attended to in the case now under consideration. As God they could not be conferred; for his glory, in this regard, was perfect before. He could not thus receive any reward, any increase of honour. That supreme and absolute dominion was inherent and essential to him, that universal adoration was his strict due from all eternity. Whatever addition he was capable of, he must be capable of as man: the elevation of his human nature is therefore the thing intended by the apostle. In this nature it was that he obeyed and merited and suffered; in this, consequently, he was rewarded and exalted. And a marvellous exaltation it is, to place human nature upon the throne of God; to subject to this, angels and principalities and powers, men and devils, all things in heaven and in earth and under the earth. A suitable reward to that nature which suffered such indignities and pains, for all the barbarous treatment and bitter torments it endured here below, to shine so bright, and partake in all the majesty of the Son of God. Who, by uniting it inseparably to his own person, and thus vouchsafing to take part in its infirmities and sufferings, entitled this human, now his own likeness, to a share in all the bliss and glories of that Divine nature which was originally and always his own. So that he is not any more, as formerly he was, the governor of the world and the object of men's worship as God only, but as God and man both. Than which nothing could more effectually conduce to *the glory of his Father*; because nothing could more illustrate his justice and wisdom and goodness; nothing more undeniably demonstrate the acceptance and efficacy of that redemption so admirably contrived for abolishing the guilt and punishment of sin, and retrieving the immortality and happiness of mankind.

2. For, secondly, this method of dealing with our Lord gives us all imaginable assurance that they who conform themselves to his virtues shall be proportionably conformed to him in the reward of them. The reason is, because in all he did and suffered for the salvation of men, and so again in all he received by way of recompense for those actions and sufferings, he acted not in any separate and personal capacity, but all along sustained a public character. This character is a consequence of his incarnation, the blessed effects whereof turn all upon this, that the Son of God transacted the whole affair of our redemption in the form and nature of those he came to redeem. Had he therefore at his entrance into the world united himself to any one man's person, the influence and benefit accruing from such union must have been of

extent equal to that of the union. That single person, I mean, to whom he was united, and no other, could have been redeemed by it. But now our blessed Saviour, when he became man, clothed himself with a body formed in the womb of the virgin by the operation of the Holy Ghost. His person was still Divine, and the same it ever had been. Only he united to it and exhibited himself in our flesh, after a manner altogether extraordinary and miraculous. This was a taking upon him human nature, and rendered him the common representative of all mankind. In this is founded the title given him by this apostle, of *the second Adam*. For as all human nature was included in him, who himself descended from none, and from whom all descended; so was all human nature made anew, as it were, in him, whose human body and soul were as immediate a work of God as that whereby our first parents' body was formed "*out of the dust of the ground*", and animated with *the breath of life*. As therefore all mankind did virtually sin and die in Adam, because the whole human nature was then in him; so are all mankind virtually righteous and restored to life in Christ, because he took human nature at large; and what he did and suffered and received in that nature, are the acts and sufferings and rewards of human nature. Consequently all who partake of this nature are not only certain of, but may in some sense be said already vested in, the happiness, which human nature in him, by already possessing, secures their common right to. And thus far all shall certainly partake of it. Death was the punishment of sin; this is done away as effectually by the *second* as it had been introduced by the *first* Adam. Their bodies and souls both shall be restored to life, and live for ever. But the forgiveness of sins and the happiness of heaven are promised upon certain conditions. And therefore, though all shall be immortal, yet only they who perform the conditions of the gospel shall be happy in that immortality.

And this shews us at once the necessity and the encouragement we all have to imitate the virtues for which our Lord was so conspicuous. The necessity, because nothing less than a likeness to his excellencies can advance us to a likeness of that bliss which rewarded them. The encouragement, because he is entered into heaven, not for himself, but us; the pledge of our immortality and glory, by our nature being already immortalized and glorified. Let us not then think any thing too much to do or to endure for our duty and the good of souls; since where the *sufferings of Christ abound, his consolations will much more abound*. Let us read and hear and meditate on the scriptures commended to our thoughts this week, with minds disposed to form themselves upon the model here before us. Observing carefully the interest we have in them, and perfectly satisfied, that, by virtue of that union which he in great humility hath been pleased to make, the sufferings and the rewards of Christ's human nature so far belong to us and all mankind, that all "*who follow the example of his patience shall undoubtedly be partakers of his resurrection*". Which he of his infinite

mercy grant, *"who was dead and is alive again, and liveth for evermore, and hath the keys of death and hell: to whom with the Father and Holy Spirit, three Persons and one God, be all honour and glory, power, praise and dominion, world without end. Amen.*

THE GOSPEL. St. Matth. xxvii. 1.

1 *When the morning was come, all the chief priests and elders of the people took counsel against Jesus to put him to death:*

2 *And when they had bound him, they led him away, and delivered him to Pontius Pilate the governor.*

3 *Then Judas, which had betrayed him, when he saw that he was condemned, repented himself, and brought again the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and elders,*

4 *Saying, I have sinned in that I have betrayed the innocent blood. And they said, What is that to us? see thou to that.*

5 *And he cast down the pieces of silver in the temple, and departed, and went and hanged himself.*

6 *And the chief priests took the silver pieces, and said, It is not lawful for to put them into the treasury, because it is the price of blood.*

7 *And they took counsel, and bought with them the potter's field, to bury strangers in.*

8 *Wherefore that field was called, The field of blood, unto this day.*

9 *Then was fulfilled that which was spoken by Jeremy the prophet, saying, And they took the thirty pieces of silver, the price of him that was valued, whom they of the children of Israel did value;*

10 *And gave them for the potter's field, as the Lord appointed me.*

11 *And Jesus stood before the governor: and the governor asked him, saying, Art thou the King of the Jews? And Jesus said unto him, Thou sayest.*

12 *And when he was accused of the chief priests and elders, he answered nothing.*

13 *Then said Pilate unto him, Hearest thou not how many things they witness against thee?*

14 *And he answered him to never a word; insomuch that the governor marvelled greatly.*

15 *Now at that feast the governor was wont to release unto the people a prisoner, whom they would.*

16 *And they had then a notable prisoner, called Barabbas.*

17 *Therefore when they were gathered together, Pilate said unto them, Whom will ye that I release unto you? Barabbas, or Jesus which is called Christ?*

18 *For he knew that for envy they had delivered him.*

19 *When he was set down on the judgment seat, his wife sent unto him, saying, Have thou nothing to do with that just man: for I have suffered many things this day in a dream because of him.*

20 But the chief priests and elders persuaded the multitude that they should ask Barabbas, and destroy Jesus.

21 The governor answered and said unto them, Whether of the twain will ye that I release unto you? They said, Barabbas.

22 Pilate saith unto them, What shall I do then with Jesus which is called Christ? They all say unto him, Let him be crucified.

23 And the governor said, Why, what evil hath he done? But they cried out the more, saying, Let him be crucified.

24 When Pilate saw that he could prevail nothing, but that rather a tumult was made, he took water, and washed his hands before the multitude, saying, I am innocent of the blood of this just person: see ye to it.

25 Then answered all the people, and said, His blood be on us, and on our children.

26 Then released he Barabbas unto them: and when he had scourged Jesus, he delivered him to be crucified.

27 Then the soldiers of the governor took Jesus into the common hall, and gathered unto him the whole band of soldiers.

28 And they stripped him, and put on him a scarlet robe.

29 And when they had platted a crown of thorns, they put it upon his head, and a reed in his right hand: and they bowed the knee before him, and mocked him, saying, Hail, king of the Jews!

30 And they spit upon him, and took the reed, and smote him on the head.

31 And after that they had mocked him, they took the robe off from him, and put his own raiment on him, and led him away to crucify him.

32 And as they came out, they found a man of Cyrene, Simon by name: him they compelled to bear his cross.

33 And when they were come unto a place called Golgotha, that is to say, a place of a skull,

34 They gave him vinegar to drink mingled with gall: and when he had tasted thereof, he would not drink.

35 And they crucified him, and parted his garments, casting lots: that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet, They parted my garments among them, and upon my vesture did they cast lots.

36 And sitting down they watched him there;

37 And set up over his head his accusation written, **THIS IS JESUS THE KING OF THE JEWS.**

38 Then were there two thieves crucified with him, one on the right hand, and another on the left.

39 And they that passed by reviled him, wagging their heads,

40 And saying, Thou that destroyest the temple, and buildest it in three days, save thyself. If thou be the Son of God, come down from the cross.

41 Likewise also the chief priests, mocking him, with the scribes and elders, said,

42 He saved others; himself he cannot save. If he be the King of Israel, let him now come down from the cross, and we will believe him.

43 He trusted in God; let him deliver him now, if he will have him: for he said, I am the Son of God.

44 *The thieves also, which were crucified with him, cast the same in his teeth.*

45 *Now from the sixth hour there was darkness over all the land unto the ninth hour.*

46 *And about the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, saying, Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani? that is to say, My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?*

47 *Some of them that stood there, when they heard that, said, This man calleth for Elias.*

48 *And straightway one of them ran, and took a sponge, and filled it with vinegar, and put it on a reed, and gave him to drink.*

49 *The rest said, Let be, let us see whether Elias will come to save him.*

50 *Jesus, when he had cried again with a loud voice, yielded up the ghost.*

51 *And, behold, the veil of the temple was rent in twain from the top to the bottom; and the earth did quake, and the rocks rent;*

52 *And the graves were opened; and many bodies of the saints which slept arose,*

53 *And came out of the graves after his resurrection, and went into the holy city, and appeared unto many.*

54 *Now when the centurion, and they that were with him, watching Jesus, saw the earthquake, and those things that were done, they feared greatly, saying, Truly this was the Son of God.*

The Gospels for this and the following days of the week, being very long and altogether historical, and best understood by comparing the parallel places in the other evangelists, (all which are read in the course of the week,) it is thought not necessary to swell this volume with particular paraphrases upon them.

COMMENT.

THOUGH Almighty God was pleased to permit that his blessed Son should suffer all the scandal and punishment due to the most heinous malefactors, yet did his wisdom order matters so that all possible right should be done to his innocence. To this purpose we read such testimonies given of it, as, if the Jews had not been blinded by the obstinacy of their own inveterate malice and rage, were abundantly full and clear enough to have convinced his bitterest enemies that they did very wickedly in treating him so ignominiously, so barbarously. He was acquitted in the most solemn and public manner by Herod and Pilate. All the evidence the Jews laboured to pick up and suborn against him was acknowledged either insufficient or inconsistent. Nay, even the wicked instrument of delivering him up into the hands of them that sought his life, enraged at their implacable and blood-thirsty proceedings, relented, desired to retract his bargain, openly confessed his own guilt, and the unblemished holiness of his injured Master. For, finding that the chief priests had declared him guilty of blasphemy, and delivered him over to the power of the Roman governor, even this wretched man was touched with a compassion of

his case, and applied himself to the Jewish rulers to prevent farther mischief. *Then Judas, which had betrayed him, when he saw that he was condemned, repented himself, and brought again the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and elders, saying, I have sinned in that I have betrayed the innocent blood.*

This is the first remarkable passage in the Gospel for the day. And my design is, to inquire into the nature of Judas his repentance, as we find it here described; to shew what qualifications it had, and wherein it was defective. And afterwards, to make such collections from hence as the circumstances of that wretched man and the foregoing particulars minister occasion for.

I. First, I shall inquire into the nature of Judas his repentance; and then, what qualifications it had, and wherein it was defective. For that it was defective in the main, I suppose there need no other proofs than such as offer themselves from what our Saviour himself spoke concerning him. *Those that thou gavest me I have kept, and none of them is lost, save the son of perdition.* And again, *The Son of man goeth as it is written of him: but woe unto that man by whom the Son of man is betrayed! it had been good for that man if he had never been born.* Now, how these things could be true of Judas, if his repentance had been such as was available for procuring pardon and salvation, is not possible to comprehend. He surely is not lost whom true repentance recovers; nor had it been good for that man never to have been born who is saved at last, though at the expense of never so painful and laborious a repentance. And therefore, since no one truth in the Gospel is more express than this, that all who truly repent shall most certainly be saved; it must follow, that the person of whom those dreadful things are pronounced did not truly and effectually repent.

The Evangelist indeed tells us that he *repented himself*; and I am well content to lay no particular stress upon the original word *μεταμελῆσθαι* here. It being sufficiently notorious to any attentive reader that *μεταμέλεια* and *μεάνουα* are promiscuously used in Scripture. Which renders any distinctions, from the manner of expression, of very little or no force in the case before us. But then it is no less evident, that by men's *repenting* is not every where intended a change of heart and life; not the whole of that which repentance strictly signifies, when made the condition of pardon and salvation; but only some part or imperfect degree of it. And thus we are to take it here. Not that Judas was a thorough penitent, and became a new man; but that he did something necessary to be done in order to our becoming new men. He felt some remorse for what he had done; he wished he had not done it at all. This is one of the first steps which all penitents set out with: it is the beginning, but very far from the perfection of repentance. And yet this is all which that expression seems to import; and therefore no argument can be formed from hence to prove the truth and validity of his repentance, properly so

called. The most that can be made of it is this, that somewhat he did towards it, but not enough to bring it to due perfection. And therefore it is, that I purpose to consider, so far as this passage will guide us in this matter, how far he advanced, and how far he fell short.

1. Now first, one good step towards repentance was, that Judas, as I said, expressed great sorrow for what he had done, and condemned himself severely for his wicked treachery. This is usually the beginning of reformation, to be sensible of one's misery, and sorely afflicted for it. But then we are to look at the motives which stir that passion and remorse in an offender's breast. Few people are so desperately hardened, as not to be struck with terror when they see the wretched consequences of their sins. And fear and suffering are arguments which oftentimes lay hold on those who seem lost to all arguments besides. Many are so profligate as to have outgrown all impressions of ingenuity and shame; but we cannot continue to be men, and remain unconcerned for our own interest and safety, when once made sensible of it. Now, though these are considerations which are commonly the first in hardened and habitual sinners, and capable of being improved from a natural to a godly sorrow; yet, where this is the main or the only argument of our remorse, I am afraid it is not sufficient to work *repentance to salvation not to be repented of*. For in this case we do not hate the fault, but the punishment. Nor are our dispositions changed one whit, or our love of God at all increased by it. And such seems to have been the sorrow of Judas. He found matters grown to a desperate height, that there was no probable appearance of Jesus escaping the malice of the Jews; he recollected, it is likely, the predictions of our Lord concerning the dreadful vengeance which should overtake the person that betrayed him to death. These and probably many other dreadful reflections working together, with all that confusion which fear and guilt use to create in men's minds, seem to have made up that concern which the text hath expressed by *repenting himself*. A concern resulting from a principle of self-preservation, in the most carnal notion of the thing. But we find not any due sense of the villainy of the fact, and condemning himself as the basest, the most ungrateful, the most abandoned wretch alive; one that had violated the laws of God and society and nature, and cast all fidelity and gratitude and common humanity behind his back. All which, and a great deal more, were not only aggravations due to his crime, but the very properest occasions of remorse, and such as till he came to be very tenderly touched for and deeply wounded with, he was not capable of arriving at the true contrition of a sincere penitent.

2. Secondly, another advance towards repentance was Judas' bringing back the thirty pieces of silver, for which he had sold his Master's life. And this is likewise necessary, that men who have offended for profit should not suffer the wages of iniquity to stick to their fingers; but disgorge all their polluted gains, and make restitution to the utmost of their power. For God will accept no man's sorrow who

is still pleased with the rewards of his injustice, and holds the wealth fast, while he pretends to abhor the guilt that procured it. So that it is the vainest thing in the world to hope to be accepted, or to obtain a pardon of those indirect dealings by which men have enriched themselves, without making satisfaction for the wrongs they have done, and shewing that they do in good earnest detest their frauds and oppressions, by giving up freely and entirely the products which these have injuriously extorted. It is not a profession of sorrow, or a charitable legacy upon a death-bed, which will serve the turn. The altar will not sanctify the gift or the giver. If men think to compound the matter with God by making over to him a part, this will never insure their souls, if, in the meanwhile, they build their houses in blood; if they transmit plentiful estates to their heirs, or raise their families by that increase of substance which was purchased by grinding the face of the poor, or crushing the innocent, who have a rightful title to what they or their posterity enjoy. This is doctrine, it may be, hard of digestion to the great and greedy. And the parting with the fruits of their wickedness is a severe saying, which they cannot endure to hear of. So far did Judas outdo too many in his repentance. And if he, notwithstanding, perished in his iniquity, what hopes can they have of forgiveness who refuse to come up to his example in this particular: he found not grace, though he sought it with restitution; and yet they flatter themselves in their hypocrisy without it. But, alas! the tears of the oppressed and injured will move compassion above, when those of the dissembling penitent will be rejected with disdain. And, be assured, repentance is but dissembled, till the spoils of deceit are cast away far from you, and all unrighteous acquisitions put into their true and proper channel again.

3. Thirdly, here is also a farther progress toward repentance, in that public and free confession, *I have sinned in that I have betrayed the innocent blood.* By which, Judas did not only take the shame of his fault upon himself, but in some degree make satisfaction to his injured Master. Men might be apt to suspect, that how fair an appearance soever Jesus made to the world, yet, had there not been something of private blame, which one so intimately well acquainted with him as Judas must be was conscious of, a disciple, a friend, a constant companion, one that had been taught and sustained by him, could never have entertained so inhumanly treacherous a thought, as to give him up into the hands of his enemies that thirsted for his blood. But now all the ground of these jealousies was taken away by the traitor's own testimonies of remorse, and open declaration of his Lord's unblemished innocence. And this would not only vindicate him to the rest of the world, and preserve his honour unstained to all posterity; but it ought likewise to have brought over those wicked accomplices, and have diverted the Jewish rulers from their purpose of murdering so holy a person. For, after such an evidence,

they were more inflexibly wicked than even Judas himself, in pursuing their malice to this person's destruction.

Now here again Judas far outstripped too many pretenders to repentance. Men are, it may be, well enough content to acknowledge their guilt between God and their own consciences; but hardly to be prevailed upon so far as to make an open confession of their crimes, or do public justice to those whose rights or reputations they have injured. There is a sort of preposterous modesty, which cannot bear the reproaches of other men, at the same time that it hath little or no apprehensions of the condemnation of one's own mind; and is much more afraid that the world should know one hath done amiss, than that God, the judge of all the world, should know it. Whereas, in truth, this taking of shame to ourselves is much more necessary, in order to restitution and satisfaction for any wrong done to our brethren, than any private confessions to God can possibly be. For, as we cannot hide our injustice from him, so neither can they whom we have injured suffer in his esteem. And therefore no acknowledgments of our faults are sufficient, but such as make them reparation: such as may be effectual to the correcting any mistaken imputations in those whom our unrighteous proceedings have led into mistakes, and lay the blame where of right it ought to lie; that is, upon the offender himself, by his own frank and free confession of his fault, and clearing the innocent, by making the acknowledgment, the sorrow, and the reproach of having done amiss, as solemn, and as generally known, if it be possible, as ever the injury or the aspersion had been. Thus only can we prevent that yet more to be dreaded publication of our crimes, which, whether we will or no, shall be made before angels and all mankind at the last terrible day of account, when God shall bring the whole world to judgment, and detect all the hidden things of dishonesty.

Some indeed there are, who have taken pains to shew that even in these two instances last mentioned Judas had by no means done all that became him, in regard he made no restitution or confession to our Lord, who was the injured party, but only to the Jewish rulers, his partners and companions in wickedness. But it were heartily to be wished that the generality of wicked persons would be persuaded to keep him company thus far, and go the same lengths that he did.

They might, upon these conditions, entertain much more reasonable hopes of attaining to another no less necessary qualification of repentance, in which his was manifestly wanting. And that is, an humble but steadfast faith in the mercy of God, and a dependence upon that sacrifice of his Son, which is available for the forgiveness even of the chief of sinners, provided they be believing and returning sinners.

Now here was Judas his downfall; that the horror of his guilt threw him into amazement and confusion and despair, and kept him from applying the proper, the only remedy that could have any effect for his recovery. For whether we understand the account given us of his death here, and in the first of the Acts, of laying violent hands

upon himself, or whether of a suffocation by extreme melancholy; either sense implies intolerable agonies and fruitless remorse, a fearful expectation of Divine vengeance, and a distrust of mercy for so great a villany.

Here then, I conceive, lay the main defect of Judas his repentance. And then we cannot be at a loss for a substantial reason why it met with no better success. For repentance does not barely consist in sorrow for sin, but in such a sorrow as is tempered and supported with hope; not in a mere confession of sin, but in such a one as trusts to be forgiven for sins confessed. It imports a change of manners; but if there be not first a strong persuasion that our sincere endeavours for the future will be kindly received, and our former transgressions graciously passed over, all ground and encouragement for such a change is utterly taken away. It requires that we choose new objects for our affections, draw them off from the world and its treacherous allurements, from the flesh and its lusts, and settle them upon God and heavenly things. But he who loves God must of necessity consider him under some other characters than those of a stern judge and implacable avenger. He must have some notions of his goodness; both of that which is essential to the perfection of his own nature, and of that which infers a disposition to be good and gracious, tender and compassionate to him in particular. For nothing but good is or can possibly be the motive of our love. And if we have no persuasion of that good, it is, as to all effect upon us, as if it were not at all. For every thing works upon the passions of men, not according to what it is in its own nature, but in proportion to what they apprehend concerning it. And therefore no man can fix his affections on heaven and heavenly joys, who hath no prospect, no hope of ever having any part or place there. It is true indeed, reason will not lead us to infer that sorrow for the past, or amendment for the time to come, can be any equivalent satisfaction for our offences. But revelation hath assured us that God may be appeased, and it hath told us how he is appeased; even by the precious blood of that Son, who came to give his life a ransom for many. God hath declared himself so fully in this matter, that the very heinousness of our sins is not a greater provocation than the despairing of mercy after we have committed them. For that distrust does, in effect and by necessary interpretation, make God a liar, and disparage the merits of Christ's sacrifice. It plainly argues, that we think God will not be so good as his word; and that there are some offences so horrid, that the sufferings of his Son cannot be a sufficient compensation for them. Thus hope of mercy, and faith in the promises and satisfaction of Christ, are the very life and spirit of true repentance; essential and indispensably requisite to quicken and recommend every part of it. And consequently, so ineffectual must Judas his repentance needs have been, which was destitute of these necessary qualifications.

If it be inquired how Judas came to be wanting in this point; the immediate cause, no question, was, that God had forsaken and with-

drawn his grace from him. But then, if we pursue this inquiry still farther, and drive it up to its true head, the matter will fall at last upon Judas himself, as the proper and original cause of his own misery and destruction. For never was there any instance of grace more obstinately resisted and abused, of advantages and knowledge to do better cast behind one's back, of presumptuous and inflexible resolutions to do wickedly, of reproofs and timely warnings lost upon a hardened wretch, than we may observe in the case before us. Then was the season of grace, and means and opportunities were not wanting for desisting from his villainous entorprise. It is true the devil is said to *have entered into Judas*: which signifies, no question, a more than ordinary influence and power over him. But we shall do well to take notice, that this is not affirmed of him or of any other person in Scripture, till we are first informed of some very grievous and often repeated impieties, which have provoked God to give them over to their own perverseness. When the Spirit of the Lord is driven away, then, and not before, the evil spirit enters and takes possession. Then he permits the tempter to have his full scope at them, by taking off those assistances and restraints which before were afforded as a check to their lusts, and a control to his temptations: and then God denies them the helps of his preventing and strengthening grace, which they have so long resisted and defeated.

11. I have now done with the first head I proposed, and from the consideration of Judas his repentance proceed to make such inferences from it as are suitable to this subject.

1. And first, let me most earnestly exhort and entreat all that read this passage, to consider the mighty danger and dismal consequences of known and wilful sins, before it be too late to prevent or to remedy them. One very successful artifice made use of by the devil for our destruction is, to dress up his temptations to such advantage, that all the profit, all the pleasure, all we propose to ourselves as our end in sinning, shall be set in its best light, and appear in proportions larger than the life; but all the difficulty, all the danger, the troubles and ill effects of it, shall be infinitely lessened to or altogether concealed from our sight. This deceit is one cause why we feel ourselves so very different men while we are pressing forward, heated with desire and big with false and flattering expectations, from what we are when looking back again upon the thing done, and stung with reproaches and self-condemnations. For, alas! these will be sure to have their turn too, and the devil is not wanting in his address in this point also. Before the fact, he hides all discouraging circumstances, and insinuates how small the fault, and how easy to be forgiven: afterwards he shifts the scene, distracts us with the dismal representations of our guilt, and labours to magnify our crime so as to be more horrid than can be forgiven. By the former he blows us up into presumption; by the latter he sinks us into despair. And both contribute equally to his purpose of contriving our ruin. But then, to be sure, he hath us fast, when we are entangled in the snare, careless what we do, and verily persuaded that there is no possibility of ever getting disengaged. The

smart of a *wounded spirit*, even when there remain some hopes of a cure, and the bitter reflections of a trembling true penitent, are grievous to be borne: but no words can express the misery of that man who hath sinned himself past hope, and is given up to the tortures and insupportable anguish of a condemning conscience.

This was directly the state of Judas. His greediness of gain blinded his eyes, and quite diverted his thoughts from considering the horror of his treachery. But then that reflection fell upon his mind with this terrible back-blow; and he that brought again the thirty pieces of silver would have given ten thousand worlds, no doubt, had he been master of them, never to have yielded to this villanous suggestion. When therefore we are assaulted by any temptation, let us be careful to take the thing in all its different prospects. Let us consider betimes, not only the baits of pleasure or profit or greatness, which are apt to dazzle the eyes of unwary sinners, but remember withal that sorrow and death are upon the hook, and think what we shall do in the end thereof. Think, I say, what our condition will be, if God should abandon us to black thoughts, to the agonies of guilt and despair; when we shall see nothing but the dreadful looking for of terrible indignation, when fiends shall surround us, and flames shall be continually flashing in our faces, and our hell shall be already begun upon earth. In other cases, our fears are apt to be the most wild and extravagant of all other passions, and scare us with images far greater and more frightful than the life; but this is the peculiar aggravation of a lost sinner's unhappiness, that the misery he lives in perpetual dread of infinitely exceeds all the terrors, even of his most jealous and melancholy apprehensions. An eternity of torments is what no finite imaginations can ever come up to. And as little can we form to ourselves a just idea of the extremity of those torments, which, though they were to last but for a moment, would, even thus, be more insupportable than whole ages of the most exquisite misery which flesh and blood is capable of enduring in this present life.

Oh! were we but careful to lay these things fairly before us, they sure would check us in our hottest and most eager pursuits, and convince us that no consideration can be sufficient for the commission of one deliberate sin. And this is what the example of Judas may be serviceable to us in. We may profit ourselves of it greatly by those fruitless pangs of remorse which God rejected when he had first been rejected by his obstinacy; by its working a dread of that justice and indignation which will not always be entreated if we outstand the season of grace; by convincing us of the wisdom of that advice which otherwise our own sad experience will confirm when it is too late: *Flee from sin, as from the face of a serpent; for if thou comest too near it, it will bite thee: the teeth thereof are as the teeth of a lion, slaying the souls of men. All iniquity is as a two-edged sword, the wounds whereof cannot be healed.*

2. Secondly, the instance before us should be a discouragement, as

against all temptations and deliberate offences in general, so more especially against covetousness. It is not for nothing that our Lord hath given that very solemn warning in this matter particularly: *'Take heed and beware of covetousness.* He knows how apt this vice, above all others, is to get within us, and how powerful to overthrow all regard for God and religion. Upon this account, when the devil had been baffled in other attempts, he makes this effort upon our blessed Saviour: *'All these things will I give thee, if thou wilt fall down and worship me.* Hence St. Paul tells us that *the love of money is the root of all evil*; that *they who will be rich, that is, who resolve and make it their business, and stick at nothing which may help them to be so, ^ufall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition.* And certainly it ought to add no small weight to those testimonies, that the most detestable villany that ever was thought of under the sun was owing to the force of this temptation; that the only instance of a despairing sinner left upon record in the New Testament is that of a treacherous and greedy Judas. Nor let us vainly suppose ourselves above the power of this lust. For who shall presume to be secure, when a friend, a disciple, an apostle, a preacher of righteousness, a worker of miracles, was yet seduced to sell his Master and his soul upon so sordid a consideration as thirty shekels of silver? This ought to put us all upon our guard. And the fate of Judas stands as a monument and eternal admonition to all that make *gold their god, and the fine gold their confidence.* A warning, not only of their proneness to do wickedly, but of the bitter fruits of doing so. For God does often deal with such as he did with Judas. He disturbs the enjoyment of their ill-gotten wealth, turns their polluted gains into their greatest curse and torment, and, instead of all the advantage and happiness they proposed to themselves, leaves them nothing of their wicked purchase in their hands but anxiety and anguish, terrors and discontent, in this world, and everlasting misery in the next.

3. Thirdly and lastly, the example of Judas here instructs us what false measures those men go upon, who measure the truth and efficacy of their repentance by the inward agonies and sufferings of their own minds. As if God could never bring a sinner to heaven any other way than by leading him through the regions of hell. It is true indeed, no man repents truly without a very serious and afflicting concern for having offended. But then this must be an active and a fruitful sorrow; such as produces a just displeasure against ourselves, an irreconcilable hatred of sin, vigorous resolutions, and a watchful care to avoid it for the future. And it is not a slight and superficial sorrow that will suffice for these purposes. But be the degree of smart more or less, whatsoever worketh repentance (that is, effectually changes our spirit and behaviour) is, without doubt, a *godly sorrow*, and great and painful enough. Let us then try our sorrow by these marks, and judge of the degree by the effects; for this rule can never deceive us. But to

^s Luke xiii. 15.

^t Matth. iv. 9.

^u 1 Tim. vi. 9, 10.

measure its efficacy by the degree is a very preposterous method, and liable to many great and fatal mistakes. For no remorse is so afflicting as that which shuts men out from all comfort: and yet this remorse is, of all other, the most fruitless, and the farthest off from true repentance. There may be, and there often is, great danger in the very degree of our sorrow. For if this degenerate into astonishment and perplexity of heart, into the darkness of horror and confusion, into distrust of mercy through Christ, and a persuasion that our sin is greater than can ever be forgiven, it is as displeasing to God and as destructive of repentance as it is tormenting and uncomfortable to the patient's own self. So that, where these terrors are not the effect of disease and a melancholy constitution, (as very often they are,) they ought to be looked upon as a fresh aggravation of the fault. For this reason God promises to heal *the broken in heart*, to pour balm into these spiritual wounds, by reviving hopes and seasonable consolations, and the supporting sense of his favour and readiness to be reconciled, and the cheering prospect of an everlasting bliss which shall wipe away all tears from the eyes of those pious mourners. And upon the same account St. Paul commands the Corinthians *to forgive and restore the incestuous person* whom they had cast out of the church, *lest perhaps such a one should be swallowed up with over-much sorrow*. In a word, God values men's reformation more than their sighs and tears. Indeed, he values these only so far as they contribute to that: and those men are sorry as they ought, who are so sorry as to sin no more. Let no man therefore distract himself with vain and fantastical notions in this matter; but let us every one so now lament his past offences as to forsake and amend them. And *blessed are all they who thus mourn, for they shall not fail to be comforted*.

MONDAY BEFORE EASTER.

FOR THE EPISTLE. Isaiah lxiii.

1 *Who is this that cometh from Edom, with dyed garments from Bozrah? this that is glorious in his apparel, travelling in the greatness of his strength? I that speak in righteousness, mighty to save.*

2 *Wherefore art thou red in thine apparel, and thy garments like him that treadeth in the winefat?*

3 *I have trodden the winepress alone; and of the people there was none with me: for I will tread them in mine anger, and trample them in my fury; and their blood shall be sprinkled upon my garments, and I will stain all my raiment.*

4 *For the day of vengeance is in mine heart, and the year of my redeemed is come.*

5 *And I looked, and there was none to help; and I wondered that there was none to uphold: therefore mine own arm brought salvation unto me; and my fury, it upheld me.*

6 And I will tread down the people in mine anger, and make them drunk in my fury, and I will bring down their strength to the earth.

7 I will mention the lovingkindnesses of the Lord, and the praises of the Lord, according to all that the Lord hath bestowed on us, and the great goodness toward the house of Israel, which he hath bestowed on them according to his mercies, and according to the multitude of his lovingkindnesses.

8 For he said, Surely they are my people, children that will not lie: so he was their Saviour.

9 In all their affliction he was afflicted, and the angel of his presence saved them: in his love and in his pity he redeemed them; and he bare them, and carried them all the days of old.

10 But they rebelled, and vexed his holy Spirit: therefore he was turned to be their enemy, and he fought against them.

11 Then he remembered the days of old, Moses, and his people, saying, Where is he that brought them up out of the sea with the shepherd of his flock? where is he that put his holy Spirit within him?

12 That led them by the right hand of Moses with his glorious arm, dividing the water before them, to make himself an everlasting name?

13 That led them through the deep, as an horse in the wilderness, that they should not stumble?

14 As a beast goeth down into the valley, the Spirit of the Lord caused him to rest: so didst thou lead thy people, to make thyself a glorious name.

15 Look down from heaven, and behold from the habitation of thy holiness and of thy glory: where is thy zeal and thy strength, the sounding of thy bowels and of thy mercies towards me? are they restrained?

16 Doubtless thou art our father, though Abraham be ignorant of us, and Israel acknowledge us not: thou, O Lord, art our father, our redeemer; thy name is from everlasting.

17 O Lord, why hast thou made us to err from thy ways, and hardened our heart from thy fear? Return for thy servants' sake, the tribes of thine inheritance.

18 The people of thy holiness have possessed it but a little while: our adversaries have trodden down thy sanctuary.

19 We are thine: thou never barest rule over them; they were not called by thy name.

COMMENT.

THIS chapter consists of three parts. In the ^afirst, the prophet describes a victorious deliverer returning from the slaughter of his own and God's enemies. In the ^bsecond, he breaks out into praise for all the wonderful mercies bestowed on his church and people, recounts the many signal appearances of his power in their favour, down from their rescue from the bondage of Egypt; enlarges upon the conducting them over the Red sea, through the wilderness, to the land of promise, where at length he fixed and caused them to rest; and intermingles

^a Ver. 1-7.

^b Ver. 7-15.

with the mention of these blessings the ingratitude and disobedience of the Israelites, which often provoked God to chastise them with afflictions, and suffer their enemies to gain advantage over them. In the third, he does in the name of that people earnestly apply to God by devout prayer; lament his displeasure, and their sins, the wretched cause of it; conjure him by his former lovingkindness, by the relation he bore to them as his children and covenanted people, by the trust they reposed in him alone, and by their present calamitous condition, to assert his own right and honour, to deliver his sanctuary and church from the insults and tyranny of idolaters, who profaned his temple and persecuted his truth.

What particular juncture of circumstances this prophecy was directed to, is not very material at present to spend time in examining. The method I am engaged in seems to make it properly my business to apply this scripture to such meaning and purposes as the church, by appointing it a part in the office of this day, intended we should take it in. And therefore, that signification which is most nearly allied to the other portions of holy writ which it stands amongst in our Liturgy, and to the design of this week's devotions, will need no other reason to recommend it to us.

Now in the first of those parts I have divided it into, and which seems chiefly to call for our meditation, the prophet introduces some person wondering at a surprising object which then presented itself. Whether himself in a vision, as some; or whether the angels, as St. Jerome hath understood it. This object is a conqueror returning bloody from battle: of whom, by way of dialogue, and in answer to the questions, Who he is, and why so habited, an account is given; representing a mighty victory, obtained at the expense of much blood and slaughter, won by the powerful but single arm of this mighty warrior. By which a total rout was given to his adversaries, at a time when, if he had not interposed, no other was disposed, no other able to have quelled that outrage and havock they were making. ^d And the stained garments he then wore demonstrated the sharpness of the engagement, as his mien and manner of approach denoted the invincible greatness of his strength.

By this description there cannot, I conceive, be any reasonable doubt, whether we be not now invited to contemplate the hardships and the success of that combat with the enemies of our souls by which Christ brought salvation to mankind: vanquishing sin and death, wresting the prey out of the hands of Satan, and, as the apostle expresses it, *having spoiled principalities and powers, triumphing over them in his cross*. A conquest full of wonder, that, in the lowest ebb of seeming weakness, discovered so much of hidden power; that made the once infamous and accursed tree an instrument of honour to himself and of blessings to the whole world; turned the object of all men's aversion and scorn to a means of *drawing all men to him*; destroyed death by enduring it; by the pouring out of his own blood, took vengeance

on the malice of that wicked spirit which spilt it; and by the agonies of a body expiring under anguish insupportable, hath prevented the everlasting torments of many millions of souls.

Such glorious effects as these deserve a place in our thoughts at this time. To silence the importunance of those cavils which unthinking and irreligious people do, from the history of our Lord's death and sufferings, take the confidence to start; and which, when that history is so oft inculcated, and uppermost in our minds, as now it ought to be, the tempter may snatch this as a favourable opportunity for suggesting. Were we indeed to read the bare narrative, and rest in matter of fact alone, it might appear altogether unaccountable how God should give up his own blessed Son, how that coeternal Son should give himself, to so much misery and shame. But by joining the Epistle and Gospel of this day together, the reason of that mysterious dispensation is in some degree explained to us. The sufferings related there are abundantly justified by the beneficial consequences ascribed to them here. The redemption of fallen man, since God in mercy was pleased to esteem it otherwise, it would ill become us sure, who enjoy the benefit, who are indeed the purchase, to think unworthy for his Son to undertake, or bought too dear at any price.

But as the advantages arising from hence prove the fitness and reasonableness, so does another argument furnished by the prophet here argue the necessity of this dispensation. For by saying that *he trod the winepress alone, that there was no helper*, and the like, he does in effect affirm, as St. Peter did afterwards to the Jewish synagogue, that there is *no other by whom men can be saved*. None was capable of procuring so glorious a deliverance less than he who undertook it. No mere man could be free from sins of his own, and all who are not so must stand in need of the sacrifice of another. Or, if any man could be supposed wholly innocent, that innocence could only save himself. He therefore that could vanquish sin and death and hell for others must be much more than man. And he who would attempt it upon the same terms our Jesus did must be much more than man too. For *greater love than this hath no man, that he lay down his life for his friends*: but to die, and so to die, for enemies and rebels and traitors, (and sinners are all these,) is a perfection of love to which he only could come up who *is love itself*.

To him therefore let us, with all humility and thankfulness, give the whole glory of this noble achievement; acknowledging all our happiness and all our hopes to be the effect, not of our own, not of any others', but entirely due to his invaluable merits. Let us, like the prophet here, when publishing his kindness, and reflecting, as at this time particularly we are bound to do, how dear it hath cost him, not forget at the same time to lament those sins of ours which added to his account. For if Isaiah found it reasonable, in terms so affectionate, to magnify his people's deliverance out of Egypt, and settle-

ment in the promised land; how insensible, how unworthy are they who read and hear the release from a heavier tyranny, the destruction of a spiritual Pharaoh, the passage into the true and heavenly Canaan opened, at the expense of our leader's own life, without impressions as grateful as human hearts can admit! If he confess that, after all those extraordinary appearances of Almighty God in their behalf, his people's disingenuous behaviour turned him to be their enemy; how greatly ought we to fear, how carefully to avoid, any unworthy returns to one that hath loved us so tenderly, which may justly alienate his affection from us, and be at once our eternal ruin and reproach! If he, again, thought the former favours of God and the remembrance of his covenant proper inducements to incline his mercy, with what confidence may we be allowed to approach him in the anguish of our souls, in distresses and temptations, plead his Son's name and merits for acceptance, and depend upon the goodness which hath not only done but endured so much for our sakes, for all proper succours and comforts! It is true our difficulties are many, our enemies mighty, ourselves impotent to the last degree; but let it be remembered for our support, that more are they that are with us than all that are or can be against us; that the heat of the action is over, and we march against a force already discomfited: he that is *mighty to save*, he that hath *"trodden the winepress of his Father's wrath alone, hath broken them in his anger, and trampled them in his fury."* And all the representations of his bitter sufferings which we are now especially conversant with, are not only so many intimations how much this conquest stood him in, but certain evidences withal that the bloody field is won. And all the prayers and tears, the fastings and mournings, that now humble our souls and exercise our bodies, are not the proper and efficient causes of, but the instruments of applying and securing a share in this conquest; acts of repentance and obedience, which hope to be accepted in *the beloved*, not in any virtue of their own, abstracted from him; decent expressions of gratitude and love to a Saviour so liberal of himself for our salvation. Thus we may die after his example, die to the sins which pierced his soul to death; and rising again to righteousness, conquer as he hath done, conquer our vicious appetites effectually, and trample down every unruly passion. So shall we be qualified to attend, to bear a part in, his triumphs; and in the midst of our religious sympathies, when melting away in sorrow for his agonies and death, have a right to sustain our spirits with the prospect of a part in the glories of his resurrection.

THE GOSPEL. St. Mark xiv.

I After two days was the feast of the passover, and of unleavened bread: and the chief priests and the scribes sought how they might take him by craft, and put him to death.

2 But they said, Not on the feast day, lest there be an uproar of the people.

3 And being in Bethany in the house of Simon the leper, as he sat at meat, there came a woman having an alabaster box of ointment of spikenard very precious; and she brake the box, and poured it on his head.

4 And there were some that had indignation within themselves, and said, Why was this waste of the ointment made?

5 For it might have been sold for more than three hundred pence, and have been given to the poor. And they murmured against her.

6 And Jesus said, Let her alone; why trouble ye her? she hath wrought a good work on me.

7 For ye have the poor with you always, and whensoever ye will ye may do them good: but me ye have not always.

8 She hath done what she could: she is come aforehand to anoint my body to the burying.

9 Verily I say unto you, Wheresoever this gospel shall be preached throughout the whole world, this also that she hath done shall be spoken of for a memorial of her.

10 And Judas Iscariot, one of the twelve, went unto the chief priests, to betray him unto them.

11 And when they heard it, they were glad, and promised to give him money. And he sought how he might conveniently betray him.

12 And the first day of unleavened bread, when they killed the passover, his disciples said unto him, Where wilt thou that we go and prepare that thou mayest eat the passover?

13 And he sendeth forth two of his disciples, and saith unto them, Go ye into the city, and there shall meet you a man bearing a pitcher of water: follow him.

14 And whosoever he shall go in, say ye to the goodman of the house, The Master saith, Where is the guestchamber, where I shall eat the passover with my disciples?

15 And he will shew you a large upper room furnished and prepared: there make ready for us.

16 And his disciples went forth, and came into the city, and found as he had said unto them: and they made ready the passover.

17 And in the evening he cometh with the twelve.

18 And as they sat and did eat, Jesus said, Verily I say unto you, One of you which eateth with me shall betray me.

19 And they began to be sorrowful, and to say unto him one by one, Is it I? and another said, Is it I?

20 And he answered and said unto them, It is one of the twelve, that dippeth with me in the dish.

21 The Son of man indeed goeth, as it is written of him: but woe to that man by whom the Son of man is betrayed! good were it for that man if he had never been born.

22 And as they did eat, Jesus took bread, and blessed, and brake it, and gave to them, and said, Take, eat: this is my body.

23 And he took the cup, and when he had given thanks, he gave it to them: and they all drank of it.

24 And he said unto them, This is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many.

25 Verily I say unto you, I will drink no more of the fruit of the vine, until that day that I drink it new in the kingdom of God.

26 And when they had sung an hymn, they went out into the mount of Olives.

27 And Jesus saith unto them, All ye shall be offended because of me this night : for it is written, I will smite the shepherd, and the sheep shall be scattered.

28 But after that I am risen, I will go before you into Galilee.

29 But Peter said unto him, Although all shall be offended, yet will not I.

30 And Jesus saith unto him, Verily I say unto thee, That this day, even in this night, before the cock crow twice, thou shalt deny me thrice.

31 But he spake the more vehemently, If I should die with thee, I will not deny thee in any wise. Likewise also said they all.

32 And they came to a place which was named Gethsemane : and he saith to his disciples, Sit ye here, while I shall pray.

33 And he taketh with him Peter and James and John, and began to be sore amazed, and to be very heavy ;

34 And saith unto them, My soul is exceeding sorrowful unto death : tarry ye here, and watch.

35 And he went forward a little, and fell on the ground, and prayed that, if it were possible, the hour might pass from him.

36 And he said, Abba, Father, all things are possible unto thee ; take away this cup from me : nevertheless not what I will, but what thou wilt.

37 And he cometh, and findeth them sleeping, and saith unto Peter, Simon, sleepest thou ? couldest not thou watch one hour ?

38 Watch ye and pray, lest ye enter into temptation. The spirit truly is ready, but the flesh is weak.

39 And again he went away, and prayed, and spake the same words.

40 And when he returned, he found them asleep again, (for their eyes were heavy,) neither wist they what to answer him.

41 And he cometh the third time, and saith unto them, Sleep on now, and take your rest : it is enough, the hour is come ; behold, the Son of man is betrayed into the hands of sinners.

42 Rise up, let us go ; lo, he that betrayeth me is at hand.

43 And immediately, while he yet spake, cometh Judas, one of the twelve, and with him a great multitude with swords and staves, from the chief priests and the scribes and the elders.

44 And he that betrayed him had given them a token, saying, Whomsoever I shall kiss, that same is he ; take him, and lead him away safely.

45 And as soon as he was come, he goeth straightway to him, and saith, Master, master ; and kissed him.

46 And they laid their hands on him, and took him.

47 And one of them that stood by drew a sword, and smote a servant of the high priest, and cut off his ear.

48 And Jesus answered and said unto them, Are ye come out, as against a thief, with swords and with staves to take me ?

49 *I was daily with you in the temple teaching, and ye took me not: but the scriptures must be fulfilled.*

50 *And they all forsook him, and fled.*

51 *And there followed him a certain young man, having a linen cloth cast about his naked body; and the young men laid hold on him.*

52 *And he left the linen cloth, and fled from them naked.*

53 *And they led Jesus away to the high priest: and with him were assembled all the chief priests and the elders and the scribes.*

54 *And Peter followed him afar off, even into the palace of the high priest: and he sat with the servants, and warmed himself at the fire.*

55 *And the chief priests and all the council sought for witness against Jesus to put him to death; and found none.*

56 *For many bare false witness against him, but their witness agreed not together.*

57 *And there arose certain, and bare false witness against him, saying,*

58 *We heard him say, I will destroy this temple that is made with hands, and within three days I will build another made without hands.*

59 *But neither so did their witness agree together.*

60 *And the high priest stood up in the midst, and asked Jesus, saying, Answerest thou nothing? what is it which these witness against thee?*

61 *But he held his peace, and answered nothing. Again the high priest asked him, and said unto him, Art thou the Christ, the Son of the Blessed?*

62 *And Jesus said, I am: and ye shall see the Son of man sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven.*

63 *Then the high priest rent his clothes, and saith, What need we any further witnesses?*

64 *Ye have heard the blasphemy: what think ye? And they all condemned him to be guilty of death.*

65 *And some began to spit on him, and to cover his face, and to buffet him, and to say unto him, Prophesy: and the servants did strike him with the palms of their hands.*

66 *And as Peter was beneath in the palace, there cometh one of the maids of the high priest:*

67 *And when she saw Peter warming himself, she looked upon him, and said, And thou also wast with Jesus of Nazareth.*

68 *But he denied, saying, I know not, neither understand I what thou sayest. And he went out into the porch; and the cock crew.*

69 *And a maid saw him again, and began to say to them that stood by, This is one of them.*

70 *And he denied it again. And a little after, they that stood by said again to Peter, Surely thou art one of them: for thou art a Galilæan, and thy speech agreeth thereto.*

71 *But he began to curse and to swear, saying, I know not this man of whom ye speak.*

72 *And the second time the cock crew. And Peter called to mind the word that Jesus said unto him, Before the cock crew twice, thou shalt deny me thrice. And when he thought thereon, he wept.*

COMMENT.

THE vileness of Judas his treachery, in delivering up his Master to the will of those bloodthirsty enemies whose implacable malice sought his life, we have had occasion in some measure to consider, when treating of yesterday's Gospel. The next thing in order of time is our Lord's celebration of his last paschal supper, and the institution of that blessed sacrament, which he designed to be a constant memorial of his body broken and his blood shed for us¹. Of which it is my purpose particularly to treat hereafter. Let us at present therefore attend him to the garden in company of his three choice friends, and thence to the high priest's hall. And so we shall employ the meditations of this day, partly on his sufferings and behaviour there, and partly on the unhappy circumstances into which one of those beloved companions shortly after fell. The former will instruct us how much he was content to endure for our sakes: the latter will put us in mind of our own weakness, when content (and, as we think, able) to suffer much for his; and what reparations are fit to be made for any failures of duty which such trials of our falsely supposed strength shall, for our humiliation, be permitted to drive us into.

First then, what more lively representation can we possibly desire of our Lord's willing sufferings for our sakes, than this which the tragical scene in the garden sets before our eyes? Those tortures of body, and that exceeding sorrow and heaviness of soul, even unto death; those agonies and earnest prayers, which extorted even sweats of blood, and a most vehement importunity, that the bitterness of that cup he was then about to drink might, if possible, pass from him; these are all indications of anguish and grief of heart, greater than can be expressed on this occasion.

By all these pangs our Lord hath convinced us at how dear a price he thought our souls worth purchasing, and what obligations to love and gratitude lie upon them for whom he endured so much. By these he shews how highly displeasing to God sin is, and what horror and dread they are to look for whose personal guilt and obstinacy render them objects of Divine wrath and vengeance, when so heavy a load of sufferings was laid on the Son of his love, as almost quite weighed down a person perfectly innocent, whose unspeakable kindness submitted to bear the sins of others. So heavy, that even he who declares the design of his coming into the world to have been that he might suffer, and drink that bitter cup, the very dregs whereof we had deserved, did yet, upon the approach and taste of it, desire, if it might be, a release from it. In which desire because there are some difficulties, we shall do well to consider the probable reasons of that request, and to observe the manner and temper of it.

Now it is not by any means to be imagined that this request proceeded from ignorance of his Father's purpose in relation to this affair

¹ Gospel for Wednesday next.

of man's redemption; nor from want of that constancy and resolution which became the generous undertaker of it; nor from any abatement of his love toward the miserable wretches for whom he undertook it; nor from rashness or inadvertency in that trying hour; nor from any apprehension of his Father's anger at his person who was then engaged in an act the most acceptable, the most beneficial, the highest instance of obedience, and that for which the Scripture declares him to have been highly rewarded, nay, to have performed it in a sense of his duty, and a certain prospect of such exceeding glory and reward. All these are interpretations that derogate from his honour, and argue a weakness of which he was not capable. And therefore, if we will be just to his character, some other account must be given of this action, consistent with the rest of his discourses and behaviour, and no way unworthy of the Son of God.

Now, in order hereunto, it is necessary we remember that this Son of God was also the Son of man; that the human no less than the Divine nature had its part in our redemption; that without an union of both, the scheme given us of it was altogether impracticable; that, this union notwithstanding, the powers and properties of each nature continued perfectly distinct, and were exerted or suspended severally as fit occasions offered: and consequently, if we will avoid confusion, we must be careful, in speaking of our Saviour's actions, to ascribe them to that principle from whence they took their rise. His miracles, his discovering the secrets of men's hearts, and the like, do therefore belong to the divine; his sufferings and death, and every thing that bears the marks of infirmity or submission, to the human nature in Christ.

In regard then that the efficacy of man's redemption depended upon a real conjunction of these two natures in one person, it was needful that clear and undoubted evidence should be given of them both in our Redeemer. But the distinguishing characters of the human nature do not consist so much in any actions or sufferings proper to the body, as in the operations essential to and affections inseparable from the human soul. And therefore it was by no means sufficient to prove our Saviour very man, that he took part of the same flesh and blood; unless it had also been demonstrated that he did partake in like manner of all the same inward passions and inclinations which are natural to mankind.

Now such, in particular, are strong desires of present ease and safety, fear of and aversion to pain and death, and whatever may greatly disturb or quite dissolve our frame and constitution. For sense, as well as reason, is a part of human nature. The impressions of the former are no less interwoven with our original composition than the dictates of the latter. And the weakness or corruption of human nature, as the case now stands with us, does not lie in our being very tenderly moved with objects of sense and the affections they raise in us; but in our proneness to be overborne by those affections,

and to act against the rules of reason and religion. Infirmities these may be called, in comparison of the freedom and perfections of God, and unbodied spirits; but they are such as our nature cannot be exempted from. And had sufferings and death been perfectly indifferent to our blessed Saviour, it is not to be conceived how he should have been our Saviour. For, upon these terms, he could not be like us in all things, sin only excepted, that is, he had not been truly man.

This seems to be sufficiently clear from the condition of Adam in the state of innocence; to whom, even then, death was threatened as a punishment. But every threatening supposes the matter of it to be something of which the party concerned hath a horror and dread; and, upon that account, thinks himself highly concerned to avoid it. So that these apprehensions in Adam were plainly antecedent to his fall, not any part of his fault, nor any consequence of it. And therefore, neither is it any just reflection upon the second Adam, that he too was subject to the like fears and aversions. For God does not expect from any man that he should have no unwillingness at all to suffer when called to it; but that he should conquer that unwillingness, rest in those appointments, and make God's choice his own. The more any of us renounce our own will upon such trying occasions, the greater is our virtue in complying with the Divine will. And therefore our Lord's desires to be excused were no disparagement either of his obedience to God or of his love to men. But, in truth, a higher commendation of both. Since, notwithstanding so tender a sense of what he was about to undergo, he gave himself up to sufferings so harsh to human nature in general, so exceeding bitter to him in particular. And therefore, the more passionate his wishes were for a release, the more meritorious was his submission.

Now that submission is fully expressed in the form of words by which he addressed to his heavenly Father. Begging that, *if it were possible*, that is, if God saw fit, and found any other method of accomplishing the great work of man's salvation equally wise and proper, he might be spared those agonies and tortures which were rushing upon him like a mighty torrent, and had already begun to afflict his soul with grief inexpressible. But at the same time, if the Divine wisdom continued to require these, settling himself to endure them with an immovable constancy of mind. *Nevertheless, not my will, but thine be done.* The former part of this petition is the voice of human nature, according to that principle of sense which God, who implanted it in every man, cannot disapprove when duly regulated. The latter is the voice of the same human nature, according to that principle of reason and duty which sets bounds to our desires, checks and controls our passions and inclinations, and represents it as a becoming and necessary act of obedience to resign ourselves and all our affairs to God's better choice, and to prefer his disposals of them and us before any desires or inclinations of our own in opposition to them. And this is all the perfection that human nature is capable of, all that God expects under any sort of difficulties and trials; to preserve such a temper of soul, as that sense shall be always in subjection to reason, and both

sense and reason ready to comply with the appointments of his good providence and the tenor of his commands. He who was innocence itself did, and we, without any reflection upon our virtue, may, fear and feel, and complain of, and pray against, and wish to be delivered from, afflictions and shame and bodily sufferings: because religion does not intend to extinguish our natural appetites, and make us cease to be men. But we must always remember to do thus with that limitation and reserve of which our blessed Master here left us a pattern; because religion's business is to reduce our natural appetites to a due subordination, and by containing them within proper measures of obedience to him who gave them us, to make and keep us good men.

Let us once more observe the success of this prayer. Which was seen, not in removing the sufferings our Saviour deprecated, but in the assistance of an angel to strengthen him under them. And we, from hence, must learn to acknowledge the wisdom and goodness of God in all our afflictions; not supposing that he hath put off the bowels of a father when he exercises our patience with calamities grievous to be borne; nor presently giving those petitions for lost and rejected which are not granted in the manner we desire: but thinking ourselves kindly dealt with, and our prayers answered to very good purpose, when he supports our spirits under those difficulties which flesh and blood are too feeble to encounter; and concluding that even events most unacceptable will, if the failing be not in ourselves, turn at last to better account than those more pleasing, but less profitable, which, if left to our own disposal, would be our portion. In short, that we never determine so wisely as when we leave all entirely to God's choice, and our last and governing desire is, that *not ours, but our Father's will may be done.*

Thus much may suffice to give us a probable account of our blessed Saviour's agonies and sorrows upon this occasion, and of the uses proper to be made of them. Which sorrows, it seems reasonable to conceive, might be highly aggravated by the clear knowledge of the horrors and wrath whereunto all to whom these sufferings prove fruitless are appointed; and from a foresight withal how vast the numbers of such will be, notwithstanding the misery he took upon himself to prevent, if it had been possible, their eternal destruction. The afflicting pain of which reflections we can no more apprehend than we can the infinite tenderness and compassion of him, who may be presumed to have felt it in proportion to his own love for the souls he died to redeem.

If we now, in the next place, observe the blessed Jesus apprehended by the officers who came to take him, receiving that treacherous kiss of an abandoned disciple, usually a token of friendship, but now a signal to the malice of his enemies, dragged by unhallowed hands to the palace of the high priest, there blindfolded and buffeted, mocked and spit upon; this sets before us, on the one hand, such barbarous and insulting cruelty as must needs raise our indignation; on the other, such invincible meekness and constancy of mind as infinitely surpass

any instance in story, and justly excite our wonder, as well as furnish matter for our use and imitation.

For the more we reflect upon ourselves, and the resentments commonly provoked in us by injuries and indignities, the more cause we shall see to admire that silence of our great Master, which so high affronts, so licentious revelings, so false accusations, had not the power to break, much less to extort the least angry return from; a silence at which his very adversaries stood astonished. Especially when sensible how very weak the charge against him was, and what advantage he might easily have taken to expose and confound the wickedness and malice of the suborned wretches who had the hardness to bring it.

A severe reproof, this silence, of that heat and clamour, and outrageous bitterness, which too often do, upon much less trying occasions, transport them who call and profess to make this Jesus their pattern; and yet even value themselves upon paying back calumnies and wrongs, insolencies and spiteful treatment, in the self-same kind. An excellent instruction, too, what deportment is proper for the injured and oppressed, when conscious of their own innocence, and committing themselves and the righteousness of their cause to the protection of a just God. And, upon both accounts, of exceeding use to be frequently meditated upon, that we may, by the help of this example, be able to master those passions which so few people feel themselves in a condition to deal with; and to preserve decency and temper when attacked by provocations which touch us even in the most sensible part.

But still, this resolute silence notwithstanding, the same Jesus, both before the high priest, and afterwards before Pilate, hath demonstrated the force of that courage which truth and innocence inspire, by laying aside all reserve when questioned concerning his own character: and by bearing a testimony, which it was designed should, and he plainly foresaw would, draw condemnation of death upon himself. Of so little account was even life to him, of so little ought it to be to us, where the cause of God is concerned, or any duty of importance so great as to require (for many there are which do require) our firm adherence and most perilous vindication.

Meanwhile, this contemplation of our meek but constant Saviour leads us to that of a frail and wavering apostle. And, as the history hath done, so it may be profitable for us to join the remembrance of the servant's (alas! human) infirmities with that of the Master's Divine perfections. The latter profits by shewing what we should be; the former we may profit ourselves of by seeing what we are, what we indeed are, then most of all, when least suspecting that we are such.

Let us then look upon St. Peter in the high priest's palace. St. Peter, not only an apostle, but one of that number singled out as a companion of our Lord's privacies, admitted to the honour of his most intimate friendship, and, upon all occasions hitherto, expressing his sense of these uncommon favours by all possible instances of gratitude and love, and more than common zeal; drawn hither at this time, most

probably, from an affectionate concern for his Master; venturing his person, notwithstanding his behaviour in the garden just before, when wounding the high priest's servant, must needs have exposed him, more than all the rest of his brethren, to the danger of being observed and ill treated by them who dealt so barbarously by his Lord. But this St. Peter presently so changed from what he had been, that, terrified with the impertinence of an inquisitive servant, he disowned and denied Jesus; repeated that denial thrice; repeated it after sufficient space for recollection; and at last bound the lie upon his soul with solemn oaths and dreadful imprecations.

Ah! where was now that gallant faith which made so glorious a confession of this Jesus being the *Christ, the Son of the living God*? Where that eager courage that did not fear to meet his Lord walking upon the sea^m? Where that bold promise, that though *all should be offended, and leave their dear Lord in his distress, yet would he never be offended*? Where that becoming resolution, *Though I should die with thee, yet will I not deny thee in any wise*ⁿ? Where all that fire and intrepidity, which but a very little while ago had singly engaged a whole band of armed men, in hope to rescue the Lord he now abjures? What shall we say to such advantages, such warnings, such proofs of affection, such boasted firmness of mind, such desperate attempts, all lost and forgotten upon the silly surmises of a servant or two, without any formal accusation brought, without any hand laid on him? What two men ever differed more from one another than this man in an hour or two differed from himself? From what himself had oft been proved, and had been all along till that very hour or two, from what he hoped and believed he should, and no doubt intended fully to continue to the last moment of his life.

Yet so sudden, so prodigious an alteration our Lord foretold and permitted, and such he thought fit we should be acquainted thereto was, in this great man. Wisely to be sure; as for other reasons, so particularly for these. That this example might effectually convince us how frail even the best are, how little masters of their own passions, how unfit to undertake for themselves, even when their desires of doing well are most fervent, and their resolutions most sincere. In short, how vain all confidences in our own strength and virtue must needs be, which, by tempting us to imagine we are something, provoke God to withdraw that grace, (the necessity whereof we do not then sufficiently apprehend,) and so, by woful experience, make us feel that in truth we are nothing.

But this fall of St. Peter, as it ought to be applied for a necessary mortification of our vanity, so may it likewise serve us for a support under our frailties and temptations. But this is a comfort which can be regularly administered to none, except to them who are careful to be like him in that repentance, whereof we have also an account in the scripture now under consideration. For, as his fault was sudden and surprising, so was his recovery speedy and effectual. Long

it was not before he was awakened into recollection by a pitying look of his injured Master, and the crowing of the cock. Immediately upon the reflection he forsook the guilty scene of his foul offence, sought a convenient place for retired thoughts, melted away in tears for the horror of his crime, and from thenceforward became again the same faithful, affectionate, undaunted St. Peter he had been before. The book of Acts informs us at large what noble reparations he afterwards made for this breach of faith. How vigorous and bold he was in preaching, how forward and even joyful in suffering for the gospel of his once denied Lord. And the same Jesus who foretold by what means he should offend, did shortly after let him understand by *what death he should glorify God*. All which are testimonies of greater value; because these were the long and constant practice of a settled faith, the course of many years, the habit and the sense of the man; whereas his crime, though exceeding great, was however of short continuance, the effect of fear and infirmity in great measure, and not so much the act of the man, as the violence of passions and temptations which had then almost unmanned him.

The same methods must we be sure to follow, when it shall please God to suffer any grievous temptation to overtake us. We must, upon the first sense of our fault, burst through and break our snare; afflict our souls with a sorrow that may carry some proportion to the sad occasion of it: nor tarry a moment in the way of temptation; never look back upon our misdemeanors without a just abhorrence; and, above all, use our utmost diligence to bring honour to virtue and religion by our future practice. It is true indeed, we cannot do all, or any part of this without the assistances of Divine grace. It is that alone can *strengthen them that stand*. It is that alone must *raise up them that fall*. But the same Jesus, *who turned upon Peter* and brought him back to himself, will not leave us to perish in our folly, but will find out some happy, some awakening dispensation. And, provided we be as careful as Peter was to observe, to strike in with, to improve it, will convert even our temptations and past sins to his glory and our own profit. The same powerful Intercessor prays for every sincere though feeble servant, that *his faith fail not*: but they that are sincere should remember they are feeble too, and not, with this apostle, sleep in the hour of danger, but watch and pray; watch constantly, pray fervently, that they enter not into *temptation*. As knowing by this example, and feeling by their own experience, that the *willingness of the spirit* is not preservative sufficient against the *weakness of the flesh*.

TUESDAY BEFORE EASTER.

FOR THE EPISTLE. Isaiah I. 5.

5 *The Lord God hath opened mine ear, and I was not rebellious, neither turned away back.*

which I readily undertook, notwithstanding I knew how ill it would be received.

6 *I gave my back to the smiters, and my cheeks to them that plucked off the hair: I hid not my face from shame and spitting.*

7 *For the Lord God will help me; therefore shall I not be confounded: therefore have I set my face like a flint, and I know that I shall not be ashamed.*

Therefore I continue impenetrable to their cruelty and scorn, as assured that I shall not be put to shame.

8 *He is near that justifieth me; who will contend with me? let us stand together: who is mine adversary? let him come near to me.*

think ill of me to come forth

9 *Behold, the Lord God will help me; who is he that shall condemn me? lo, they all shall wax old as a garment; the moth shall eat them up.*

10 *Who is among you that feareth the Lord, that obeyeth the voice of his servant, that walketh in darkness, and hath no light? let him trust in the name of the Lord, and stay upon his God.*

if these be under grievous troubles, and have no comfort; let not their afflictions drive them to despair, but (after my example) put them upon a firm dependence on the God they serve for protection and deliverance.

11 *Behold, all ye that kindle a fire, that compass yourselves about with sparks: walk in the light of your fire, and in the sparks that ye have kindled. This shall ye have of mine hand; ye shall lie down in sorrow.*

satisfaction shall be, to perish in misery and lasting grief.

5. God hath chosen me for his servant, and instructed me in my errand,

6. I submitted to all manner of contumelious usage, and was not discouraged by it.

7. For God, I know, will support me, so that the malice of my enemies shall not prevail to my destruction.

to their cruelty and scorn,

8. He will plead my cause and vindicate my innocence, so that I dare confidently challenge all that speak or and make good their charge.

9. God will stand by me in this trial I put myself upon; and all my accusers shall fail and fret away.

10. If among so great a number of slanderers and scorers there be found some few who fear God and hearken to his messenger;

if these be under grievous troubles, and have no comfort; let not their afflictions drive them to despair, but (after my example) put them upon a firm dependence on the God they serve for protection and deliverance.

11. But as for you, who think to secure yourselves by wicked means, go on in your vain projects; but know that the end of all your short imaginary satis-

COMMENT.

THIS portion of Scripture contains so exact a description of the barbarous indignities our blessed Saviour suffered, and of his meek

deportment under them, as looks more like an historical narration of facts already past, than a prediction of events then several hundred years to come. Had Isaiah been present at the high priest's palace and the judgment-hall, what fuller representation could he, what indeed do the evangelists themselves give more punctual, than that which the Holy Ghost hath here inspired him with? They who attend to the connexion of this with the chapter next before will see reason sufficient to conclude that the prophet in both personates the Messiah. And they who compare the account here with that of our Lord's passion in the New Testament must be utterly blind, or extremely perverse, if they can any longer suffer themselves to doubt whether Jesus of Nazareth were that Messiah.

In regard then that this prophecy is so plain as to ask no enlargement, either for the interpreting or the applying it, we may very well join it with the Gospel of the day, as partly introductory and partly parallel to it. The affronts and injuries committed upon our blessed Saviour at the palace of the high priest make the subject of this Epistle; which leads him, as it were, from the garden through all the painful steps of rudeness and violence, insult and scorn and reproach, till it sets him at Pilate's bar. There the Gospel takes him up and carries him on to crucifixion and death. So that both together proceeding in so regular a method, and making one continued relation, I choose to treat upon them together. Not forgetting, in the meanwhile, some particulars which Isaiah here suggests proper matter for, and fit to be observed, as inferences well suited for the close of the whole. Such are,

1. The expedience of that Saviour, who came to expiate for the sins of the world, not only dying as a sacrifice, but prefacing that death with all the most aggravating circumstances of shame and scorn and detestation.

2. The use and comfort which these sufferings of our blessed Lord may be of to any good men when under any extremity of affliction or disgrace, ver. 7—11.

3. The disappointment and guilt and severe punishment of our great Master's murderers and persecutors; and, in proportion, of all who depend altogether upon human means for compassing their designs; especially if, as in the case before us, those means or designs be both or either of them wicked. Thus much I gather from ver. 7, 8, 9, 11.

Such is the improvement of the passage at hand, obvious to every reader, and all exemplified in the sufferings and death of our dear Redeemer, to which we will now proceed.

THE GOSPEL. St. Mark xv.

1 *And straightway in the morning the chief priests held a consultation with the elders and scribes and the whole council, and bound Jesus, and carried him away, and delivered him to Pilate.*

2 And Pilate asked him, *Art thou the King of the Jews?* And he answering said unto him, *Thou sayest it.*

3 And the chief priests accused him of many things: but he answered nothing.

4 And Pilate asked him again, saying, *Answerest thou nothing?* behold how many things they witness against thee.

5 But Jesus yet answered nothing; so that Pilate marvelled.

6 Now at that feast he released unto them one prisoner, whomsoever they desired.

7 And there was one named Barabbas, which lay bound with them that had made insurrection with him, who had committed murder in the insurrection.

8 And the multitude crying aloud began to desire him to do as he had ever done unto them.

9 But Pilate answered them, saying, *Will ye that I release unto you the King of the Jews?*

10 For he knew that the chief priests had delivered him for envy.

11 But the chief priests moved the people, that he should rather release Barabbas unto them.

12 And Pilate answered and said again unto them, *What will ye then that I shall do unto him whom ye call the King of the Jews?*

13 And they cried out again, *Crucify him.*

14 Then Pilate said unto them, *Why, what evil hath he done?* And they cried out the more exceedingly, *Crucify him.*

15 And so Pilate, willing to content the people, released Barabbas unto them, and delivered Jesus, when he had scourged him, to be crucified.

16 And the soldiers led him away into the hall, called *Prætorium*; and they call together the whole band.

17 And they clothed him with purple, and platted a crown of thorns, and put it about his head,

18 And began to salute him, *Hail, King of the Jews!*

19 And they smote him on the head with a reed, and did spit upon him, and bowing their knees worshipped him.

20 And when they had mocked him, they took off the purple from him, and put his own clothes on him, and led him out to crucify him.

21 And they compel one Simon a Cyrenian, who passed by, coming out of the country, the father of Alexander and Rufus, to bear his cross.

22 And they bring him unto the place *Golgotha*, which is, being interpreted, *The place of a skull.*

23 And they gave him to drink wine mingled with myrrh: but he received it not.

24 And when they had crucified him, they parted his garments, casting lots upon them, what every man should take.

25 And it was the third hour, and they crucified him.

26 And the superscription of his accusation was written over, **THE KING OF THE JEWS.**

27 And with him they crucify two thieves; the one on his right hand, and the other on his left.

28 *And the scripture was fulfilled, which saith, And he was numbered with the transgressors.*

29 *And they that passed by railed on him, wagging their heads, and saying, Ah, thou that destroyest the temple, and buildest it in three days,*

30 *Save thyself, and come down from the cross.*

31 *Likewise also the chief priests mocking said among themselves with the scribes, He saved others ; himself he cannot save.*

32 *Let Christ the King of Israel descend now from the cross, that we may see and believe. And they that were crucified with him reviled him.*

33 *And when the sixth hour was come, there was darkness over the whole land until the ninth hour.*

34 *And at the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, saying, Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani ? which is, being interpreted, My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me ?*

35 *And some of them that stood by, when they heard it, said, Behold, he calleth Elias.*

36 *And one ran and filled a sponge full of vinegar, and put it on a reed, and gave him to drink, saying, Let alone ; let us see whether Elias will come to take him down.*

37 *And Jesus cried with a loud voice, and gave up the ghost.*

38 *And the veil of the temple was rent in twain from the top to the bottom.*

39 *And when the centurion, which stood over against him, saw that he so cried out, and gave up the ghost, he said, Truly this man was the Son of God.*

COMMENT.

If ever suffering innocence and injured virtue had power to move compassion, and melt us into tears ; if ever the barbarity and insolence of base and wicked men could provoke our just indignation and abhorrence, let it appear at this time. At this, I say, the service whereof presents us with a scene of the blackest villany that ever malicious and enraged people were guilty of ; and at the same time too, with the brightest, the most unspotted virtue, the meekest, the most invincible patience, that ever suffered in human flesh. Had some very vile impostor been exposed, abused, tormented as the evangelists relate, yet the cruelty even to such a man would have been thought great, and the foulness of his guilt would scarce have extinguished all our pity. But when a person was so ill treated, whose only message into the world was to lead men into the truth, who was himself *the way, the truth, and the life* ; who can be so inhuman as not to resent it with a quick and tender sense of what he endured, and with the greatest detestation of those merciless, malicious wretches that inflicted it upon him ? All this, I say, is due to our Lord's innocence and injured virtue. But when we consider farther, that those sufferings had a secret end, unseen to the beholders of them at that time, that they were directed and designed by Almighty God to the most glorious purposes of redeeming mankind from sin and hell, and making this just and holy person a sacrifice and atonement for the whole

world ; when we observe that he suffered for us, in our stead, and for our unspeakable benefit ; then pity is too low, too cold a passion ; and it is necessary we should be transported with wonder, and inflamed with gratitude and love. The dying for us, though in all those alleviating circumstances that might have softened death, and made it the most easy and tolerable that it could be made, is what most of us, who are fond of life for the mere sake of living, have reason to magnify as an unparalleled instance of kindness. But to submit to all those aggravations which add to the terrors of dying, and are infinitely more grievous than the thing itself, shews plainly that there was nothing thought too much for compassing our happiness, and that his kindness and zeal for our redemption knew no bounds. Nay, which is yet more, this person was not under any natural necessity of dying, as we all are ; but God, blessed from all eternity, God, above the reach of suffering or pain or corruption ; and yet, blessed and impassible as he was, he made that his choice which could not be his fate. He took a body capable of misery and death, and he took it on purpose that he might suffer and die in it. So free, so amazing was this goodness ; so little did the eternal Father spare his own Son, so far was the Son from sparing himself for us.

To have his blood set to sale at a price, and that but a very low and poor one too ; that blood, which was a purchase more than equivalent to the whole world, rated at *thirty pieces of silver* ; to be betrayed and sold by one of his own servants, his friend and constant companion, one who was honoured with the dignity of an apostle, with the power of working miracles, with a commission of preaching his gospel, and (to free him from the temptation of such base avarice) was intrusted with the bag, and made distributor of the stores of his Master ; to be assaulted with swords and staves, and apprehended as a common robber and pest of mankind ; to be haled from one high priest to another, and there blindfolded, spit upon, buffeted, and insulted over ; to be exposed to the mercenary tongues of false witnesses, and in the midst of all this distress left alone ; not one friend, not one disciple to stand by him, but forsaken by the rest, and solemnly disowned and denied by the chief of them ; to be dragged from one judgment-seat to another, and, when neither Pilate nor Herod could find any fault in him, yet to have a most unjust sentence of death pronounced against him ; pronounced by that very mouth, which, at the same instant, was so overpowered with the force of truth, as to attest and proclaim his innocence, and so condemn itself of iniquity and cowardice ; to have a known robber and murderer, one who stood convicted of sedition and blood, preferred before him, and so be made a sacrifice to the rage and implacable envy of a tumultuous rabble : these are all of them circumstances of such horror and insolence and cruelty, as never met together before. They render this a case without a parallel, a death beyond example, a wickedness beyond expression. Each of them would very well bear, each of them very well deserves, such an enlargement as must needs be very moving, very amazing. They are a subject too large for a

discourse, fit indeed to take up the greatest part of our lives. Therefore I will only fix upon some very few particulars at present, and so represent them to my reader's consideration, as to give him a hint how he ought to proceed in the rest. That is, first, to set forth the things themselves; and, secondly, to shew what profitable and pious reflections they ought to raise in our minds.

The crimes alleged against Jesus before the high priest were too false or too frivolous to bear any weight; and all the evidence that they had packed against him was found insufficient to take away his life. In all which we may observe a particular providence. For, it being foretold that the Messiah should be crucified, if he had died by the hands of the Jews, or for any offence against their law, this could not have been accomplished; because crucifixion was not a Jewish, but a Roman punishment. When therefore he had acquitted himself before their council, they pursue him with a fresh accusation, bring him before the governor, and there charge him with treason against Cæsar in making himself a king. This Pilate soon discovered to be merely the effect of envy and spite, but however, not daring to provoke the people by an act of justice that might call his loyalty and zeal for Cæsar into question, he yielded to their clamours, and gave command that the prisoner should be crucified according to their desire. This punishment, as will appear by and by, was enough, one would think, to gratify the most inveterate malice. But however, to make the pomp of it the greater, and give their rage its full scope, they first divert themselves with his misery, and barbarously insult over their supposed malefactor. *¶ The soldiers of the governor took Jesus into the common-hall, and gathered unto him the whole band; and they stripped him, and put on him a scarlet robe; and when they had platted a crown of thorns, they put it upon his head, and a reed in his right hand; and they bowed the knee before him, and mocked him, saying, Hail, King of the Jews! And they spit upon him, and took the reed and smote him on the head.* Inhuman wretches! thus to revel and sport with a condemned man; to triumph in his death, and preface it with so much pageantry and derision! This is a barbarity unknown even to them who deal in blood. And undergoing the law is allowed a satisfaction even for the most guilty. But so God was pleased at that time to suffer it, that they should behave themselves most unbecoming the character of soldiers and Romans, to fill up the measure of their iniquities, and the bitterness of that cup which his Son was appointed to drink. It was requisite that sin should be exposed every way that was possible. And therefore he, who had no sin of his own, but took ours upon him, must suffer all that was any way due to it, all that could be consistent with his nature to suffer. The King of heaven and earth was therefore arrayed in purple, and made a spectacle to the people, as if he had pretended to a royalty which belonged not to him. A mock crown and sceptre is given him, and obeisance made to him in jest and wantonness, that he might be the gazing and the laughing-stock of the

beholders. Royal salutations, seconded with spittings in his face, and his sceptre broke about his head, to render him more ridiculous and contemptible. Malice was then let loose, and all the instruments of hell set on work, to make the injury more black and detestable. This was Satan's *hour, and the power of darkness*; and it appeared to be so, by such unrelenting cruelties as could never have been exercised, if the committers of them had not been carried beyond the common corruptions of nature, and for that time ceased to be men. For though the nature of government and civil constitutions require great severities upon such as are found or supposed to have grievously offended; yet no laws pretend to countenance barbarity and insolence, and we can scarce forbid ourselves pitying the worst of criminals. But here was a person declared wholly blameless; none of the courts before whom he stood could convict him of the least fault; the very judge who partially condemned him washed his hands publicly, and disclaimed the having any thing to do in taking him off. And yet this just man found no bowels, but all possible industry was used to add to his torment, and to render him more vile and odious, and more unworthy of compassion.

But though insolence and cruelty be detestable upon all occasions, and more so yet to the innocent and injured, yet is there something of difference with regard to the dignity of the person against whom it is exercised; and the more exalted his character is, the more cutting it is in him that endures, and the more villainous in them that commit it. Our own nation hath seen (and woe unto us that we have seen) an excellent prince inhumanly exposed, murdered with wicked triumph; and all good men, I think, must needs look back upon that fact with grief and horror and great indignation. But alas! though this were such a wickedness as hath seldom been seen under the sun, yet how vastly short does it come of the affronts and indignities put upon our blessed Lord! The best and holiest of the sons of men are not pure in his sight, nor ought to be compared with his innocence, even as man; and the greatest and most glorious monarchs are yet infinitely more beneath his Divine majesty and perfections. Yet even this unblemished virtue, even this Almighty King, suffered the rudeness and insults of a blind and enraged multitude. He permitted himself to be made, as it was written of him long before, *a worm and no man, a very scorn of men, and the outcast of the people; all they that saw him laughed him to scorn*^r. They entertained themselves with reproaching and ridiculing him, and when they had ended this insolent farce, they then proceeded to act the last part of their intended tragedy, and resolved to glut their fury with his blood. Yet still they proceed to observe their former method of giving scoffs and stripes together, to wound his soul as well as bruise his body. For after they had mocked him, they led him away to crucify him. A death, the most dreadful of all others, both for the shame and for the pain of it.

First, crucifixion was a death full of shame. So scandalous, that

it was inflicted as the last mark of detestation upon the vilest of people. Peculiar to the meanest condition, and to the most heinous offences. It was the punishment of robbers and murderers, provided that they were slaves too. But otherwise, if they were free, and had the privileges of the city of Rome, this was then thought a prostitution of that honour, and too infamous a penalty for such a one, let his misdemeanor have been what it would. Accordingly we see what companions our Saviour had in his death, how *he was numbered among the worst of transgressors*, and (according to the prophet) *made his grave with the wicked*. Nay, so very odious and abominable was this punishment, that when they had a mind to brand the memory of any very flagitious people, traitors to the state, and common enemies to mankind, we are told that they thought it a most effectual way to fix an indelible infamy upon them, to hang their pictures thus; and to crucify those in effigy, whom they could not serve so in their own persons. Heroin then we perceive the unspeakable condescension of our blessed Saviour, who did not only vouchsafe to die, but did not disdain the most ignominious death that the malice and scorn of his enemies could inflict; *to take upon him the form of the meanest servant*, nay of the basest and blackest criminal; *that he became obedient unto death*, was a most astonishing instance of humility; but to stoop so very low *as the death of the cross*, this was *to make himself of no reputation* indeed.

Secondly, this death was terrible above others, not only for the scandal and disgrace, but for the extreme pain and torture of it. And of this the very manner is enough to convince us. For, the form of a cross being that of two posts cutting one another to right angles; on that which stood upright the body was fastened by nailing the feet to it, and to the other transverse piece by nailing the hands on each side. The pain whereof must needs be most acute, because these parts of the body, being the instruments of action and motion, are provided by nature with a much greater quantity of nerves than others have occasion for. And since all sensation is performed by the spirits in these nerves, wheresoever they abound the senso must needs, in proportion, be more quick and tender. And in this case we are to consider the hands and feet, not only as pierced through with iron pins, and these so large, that Thomas required for his conviction to *thrust his finger into the print* of them; but the weight of the whole body hanging upon those fastenings, and those tormenting distortions of the limbs which the Psalmist signified, when (speaking in the person of our Saviour) he complains, *They pierced my hands and my feet, I may tell all my bones*. If the bitterness of this pain had been in any degree recompensed by the shortness, it had yet been more tolerable. But alas! it was a very slow and lingering, as well as an exceeding sharp death. For though the misery was so great, yet none of the vitals were immediately affected, and the body continued thus stretched out till excess of anguish had by degrees quite exhausted the spirits, and driven out the soul. Our blessed Saviour, we are told expressly,

continued thus three long hours in languishings and thirsts, and leisurely pangs of approaching death. And at last, with strong cries and groans, gave up the ghost. What a tedious torment is this, in comparison of those executions that malefactors commonly undergo, where the seat of life is immediately assaulted, and the sense of pain can be but very short! The Romans themselves, who used this punishment, were frequently so compassionate as to strangle the party first, and content themselves with exposing the dead body upon the cross. But in our Saviour's case there was no relenting, no remains of humanity for his ease and relief. Death attacked him in its most frightful shape, and wreaked his utmost spite upon him. The length of his misery was so far from being unusual, that, we are told, the governor wondered to hear in the evening that he was dead so soon. And the soldiers who came to take the bodies down from the cross found the two companions of his shame still struggling for life. But to us it cannot seem strange that his spirits should be so much sooner wasted, who know what variety of miseries he passed through to it. The wondrous and unspeakable agony in the garden, the violence of the Jews, the buffetings of the servants, the being harassed and dragged from one court of judicature to another, the thorny crown and merciless scourges, those deep furrows which the barbarous plowers cut in his back; all these, I say, and (which was yet worse than all these) that unconceivable anguish and sad anxiety of heart, which, before any outward violence was offered to him, did with its own weight depress his soul, and make it exceeding sorrowful and heavy, even unto death; all conspired to spend his natural strength, and force his life away. Nature was quite worn out, and what was wanting in length of time upon the cross had been supplied another way, many other ways; many other ways indeed to us unknown. For certainly never any person died with such variety, such bitterness of torments, of studied malicious torments. Never any was sensible of such exquisite misery, nor had cause to utter such a doleful complaint, as he, who, though the Son of God, yet felt himself so destitute of consolation and support as to cry out, with a passion that looked almost like despair, *My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?*

Such were the sufferings of our dying Redeemer: such, and infinitely greater than it is possible for me to express, or any man to conceive: but so much of them as we are capable of apprehending will, if duly considered, be of great use to us. Particularly, it may be very proper upon this occasion, as hath this day been already intimated, to observe,

1. First, the expedience of that Saviour who came to expiate the sins of mankind dying under all the most aggravating circumstances of shame and scorn and detestation. This, no doubt, was done, as I hinted before, to expose the heinousness of sin, to prove how just an object it is of the wrath of God, how vilely it degrades the committers of it, and to teach us that no disgrace or punishment can be too great for such, when we see him, who only stood in the place of sinners, loaded with all the sufferings and indignities capable of being under-

gone by a person perfectly innocent, and by the human united to the Divine nature.

So was it expedient too for manifesting the tenderness of his love, the incomparable greatness of his humility and condescension, and his boundless generosity and zeal for accomplishing the noble design he came about, and not disdaining even the most difficult terms of working out the salvation of souls.

So was it once more for instructing us in the nature of the like reproaches and sufferings, and that we are not to measure men's virtue, or the state of their souls with regard to the favour of God and another world, by such marks as these, since the Son of his love endured them without forfeiting the one or staining the other. And so it was again for setting us an example of meekness and patience, and forgiveness of the wicked instruments of such inhuman treatment, if at any time it shall be permitted to befall us.

2. The next particular, concerning the use and comfort which our Lord's sufferings may bring to good men in affliction, hath been already spoke to upon the Epistle for Sunday last.

3. The third is therefore that which I choose at present to insist upon; the disappointment, I mean, and guilt of our great Master's murderers and persecutors; and, in proportion, of all who depend upon human force and subtlety for compassing of wicked designs. And here, who can sufficiently admire the wisdom of Almighty God, who thus ordered the great work of man's redemption, in despite of all the malice and subtlety of the devil and his wicked instruments to the contrary? The envy and spite of the chief priests and Pharisees, the casiness and fury of the common people, the rage and insolence of the soldiers, the profligate consciences of false witnesses, the treachery and avarice of one of Christ's own disciples, the timorousness of a corrupt and timeserving judge; the barbarity of those who derided and scourged and crucified him, and insulted over his dying agonies and pains; all these were made use of by the enemy of mankind to destroy Jesus, and to overthrow his kingdom, and to root out his name and all honour for it from among men. And yet see how vain all these attempts were in the event. They were overruled by Providence, so as to bring about those very purposes which the actors and the evil spirit who set those engines at work laboured to defeat. They every one conspired to render the matter more glorious, more uniform, more exactly conformable to the original scheme and design marked out for it; and each contributed to finish that work which some of them knew not of, which others opposed, which none of them in the least intended. This was the only way they could think of for ruining the reputation of Jesus, and blotting out the remembrance of his miracles and doctrine; and yet, in reality, it was the only way by which his Gospel could be established beyond all contradiction, and to all future ages. For, had not these men been so exceedingly, so perversely barbarous and wicked, this holy teacher, this innocent liver, this general benefactor to wretches in distress, could never have been taken off by so ignominious a death. Had he not been put to such a

death, he could not have suffered the shame and torment which the Divine justice required as a satisfaction for the sins of men. Had not the proceedings against him been injurious and unreasonable, that death had not had the merit of a sacrifice and expiation for the guilty whose persons he bore. Had not the innocent Jesus thus died, the *prince of this world* had not been judged; but that was the devil's condemnation in the present case, that he *had nothing* in the person against whom he exercised such cruelty. In a word, had he not died, he had not conquered death, nor led captivity captive. For St. Paul tells us expressly, that the Son of God was made like unto us, and took a mortal nature upon him, *"that by death he might destroy him that had the power of death, even the devil, and release them who through fear of death were all their life long subject to bondage."* Thus did the wicked one fall *"into his own snare, and in the same net that he hid privily was his own foot taken; his devices returned upon his own head, and his mischiefs fell upon his own pate."* So vain and blind are all the counsels of men, so impotent all the cunning and subtlety of hell itself, when they undertake to fight against God. And (which was eminently visible in the death of our blessed Saviour) the prophecies they fulfilled to a tittle, while they did all in their power to evacuate them; the divine counsels which they unawares effected, and the quite contrary ends they served to what they hoped and laboured to have done, though it be the most glorious, the most conspicuous, yet is it far from being the only instance of a wonderful, wise, and almighty Providence bringing good out of evil, and excellent and most beneficial events out of most unlikely, most ungodly, most malicious intentions. This every diligent observer will find instances of, frequent enough to convince any thinking man, that how casual soever things at first sight may appear, yet there is *one who ruleth over all, and worketh after the counsel of his own will.* And how successful or formidable soever the enemies of truth and goodness may seem in our eyes, yet they cannot bind the hands nor cross the purposes of the great Governor of the world. He will assert his own honour, and do right to his suffering and injured servants; and even then, when the wicked think themselves most secure, will shew them their folly, and blast them with the breath of his displeasure. Blessed therefore be his wise and watchful providence, which thus consults his own honour and the good of his beloved ones by dark and mysterious ways! blessed be that admirable management and skill, which turns even the obstinacy of wicked men, and their attempts against religion, into means of promoting and securing it! blessed for ever be that amazing goodness which turned an unexampled murder into a most precious sacrifice, transformed the ignominy of the cross into a banner of honour and triumph; and when the princes and rulers, with Herod and Pontius Pilate, were gathered against him and his Christ, looked down from heaven with scorn, and had them in derision; put a hook in their nose, and a bridle in their lips; and, while they gratified their own implacable malice, suffered that

malice to suggest no other things to them than what himself had long ago determined, and his prophets foretold should be so done ! Blessed be that wisdom which thus made sin instrumental to destroy sin, that of the blood shed by wicked hands opened a fountain to wash away uncleanness, and appointed the holy Jesus, treated as a vile malefactor, for a Prince and Saviour, nay, for the only, the efficacious Author of eternal salvation to all that sincerely believe and obey him ! Blessed, lastly, be that truth which thus preserved an exact harmony between the law and the gospel, the prophecies and the respective accomplishments, that crowned the shadows of the Levitical dispensation with their proper substance, that provided a *Lamb which did indeed take away the sins of the world*; and suffered no one circumstance to be wanting in his death which could be necessary to make good the promises, or satisfy the justice; or convince men of the love and goodness of God !

WEDNESDAY BEFORE EASTER.

THE EPISTLE. Hebr. ix. 16.

16 *Where a testament is, there must also of necessity be the death of the testator.* 16. I had said that the promise of eternal inheritance was received by means of death: and this is agreeable to the condition of all other inheritances conveyed by will, and of all covenants ratified with blood.

17 *For a testament is of force after men are dead: otherwise it is of no strength at all while the testator liveth.* 17. While the devisor lives, he may alter his will; and therefore his death must be proved, to give the will force. And in covenants, till the blood was shed, no bargain was struck.

18 *Whereupon neither the first testament was dedicated without blood.* 18. The necessity of this bloodshedding God plainly signified in the rites by which the former (the Levitical) covenant was made. Exod. xxiv.

19 *For when Moses had spoken every precept to all the people according to the law, he took the blood of calves and of goats, with water, and scarlet wool, and hyssop, and sprinkled both the book, and all the people,*

20 *Saying, This is the blood of the testament which God hath enjoined unto you.*

21 *Moreover he sprinkled with blood both the tabernacle, and all the vessels of the ministry.*

22 *And almost all things are by the law purged with blood; and without shedding of blood is no remission.*

22. Some few excepted, as metals which were purified by fire, and clothes by water. See Numb. xxxi. 23. Levit. xvi. 28. The rest were purified by being sprinkled with blood.

22. Some few excepted, as metals which were purified by fire, and clothes by water.

28. The rest were purified

23 *It was therefore necessary that the patterns of things in the heavens should be purified with these; but the heavenly things themselves with better sacrifices than these.* but to procure them admittance into heaven itself, a nobler blood (even that of Christ) was necessary.

24 *For Christ is not entered into the holy places made with hands, which are the figures of the true; but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us:*

25 *Nor yet that he should offer himself often, as the high priest entereth into the holy place every year with blood of others;*

26 *For then must he often have suffered since the foundation of the world: but now once in the end of the world hath he appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself.*

venly sanctuary, (as the high priest did into the earthly one,) he must have died often in order to each entrance.

27 *And as it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment:*

28 *So Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many; and unto them that look for him shall he appear the second time without sin unto salvation.*

offering, to bestow that salvation which the sacrifice of himself at his first coming purchased for all that trust in and expect it from him.

23. Thus did men gain access to that sanctuary which was a type of heaven; but to procure them admittance into heaven itself, a nobler blood (even that of Christ) was necessary.

26. For since his appearing before God on our behalf is a consequence of shedding his blood; had he often entered into the heavenly sanctuary, (as the high priest did into the earthly one,) he must have died often in order to each entrance.

27. But in this regard too he was like other men, who die but once.

28. At his first appearance he was our sacrifice for sin, but at his second he shall come without any such offering, to bestow that salvation which the sacrifice of himself at his first coming purchased for all that trust in and expect it from him.

COMMENT.

THE apostle had said, in the verse next before, that Christ is the Mediator of the new testament, that by means of death they which are called might receive remission of sins, and the promise of eternal inheritance. He proceeds here to shew the necessity of Christ's death in order to that purpose. The nature of which argument it may be convenient to illustrate according to the twofold sense of the original word, as it is capable of being rendered a testament or a covenant.

If we take it in the former signification, our dying Redeemer is the testator; the legacy or inheritance bequeathed to us is immortality in heaven, expressed thus by himself; *a Father, I will that they whom thou hast given me be with me where I am; that they may behold my glory, which thou hast given me:* and the title we have to this happiness is that death of his, which opened the kingdom of heaven to all believers. By this importance of the word is intimated to us the freedom of the

gift; but then our duty is implied in it likewise: it being a known rule in all testamentary laws, that he who takes the benefit of any legacy does, by that very act, oblige himself to and become answerable for all the conditions upon which it pleased the deceased that such benefit should be suspended. And in this latitude, the expression comes very little short of that more usual notion of the original word, and which comes next to be considered, that of a covenant.

Thus it is evident we must understand it at the 20th verse here, and indeed in most places where the apostles and evangelists have thought fit to make use of it. Nor is this, I conceive, any incommodious sense even of the 16th and 17th verses, which yet do, more than any other passage, incline to that other acceptation of a testament, strictly so called. For the method of making covenants heretofore is known almost everywhere to have been by slaying of beasts. A significant ceremony implying a sort of confession that the contractors deserved to be, and an execration or wish that they might be, treated by Divine vengeance as those beasts then were, in case they proved false to the compacts ratified between them in so solemn a manner.

With like formalities the author of this Epistle does here put the Hebrews in mind that the covenant made with their ancestors by the law of Moses was established. Designed on that occasion too, no doubt, to awaken in them a sense of the death due to all who should presume to violate it. Thus far, as the rite, so the meaning of it, was common to that with all other covenants. But it had besides a peculiar importance here, by which the parties indenting with God were given to understand that he would not remit sins without a vicarious death; and that those beasts then slain in sacrifice were figures of a death to be suffered and of blood to be shed for the ransom of their souls; as well as implications of the punishments they had incurred, and must otherwise have endured in their own persons.

But the apostle puts this difference between the new, or evangelical, and all other covenants, that although God still continued to use the same method of ratifying with blood, yet he did not make use of the same blood. There it was the blood of goats and calves, here the blood of his own Son made man, that intervened. A commutation nobler, in proportion as the benefits contracted for were better. But still the rule held true, that *without shedding of blood is no remission*. The mediator therefore must die, or no covenant could be struck: and consequently, the necessity of dying to give effect to this contract being equal with that of rendering a last will valid, matters in neither case being immutably fixed till such death be over, I apprehend not any violence done, either to the apostle's argument or to the text itself, by keeping to the more common signification of the word, and by *testament* and *testator* (ver. 16, 17.) understanding a covenant, and the person whose death is made the means of ratifying that covenant.

The reason of this difference in the instrument of confirming the new covenant we have at the 23d versc: *It was necessary that the patterns of things in the heavens should be purified with these; but the heavenly things themselves with better sacrifices than these.* By the former, some understand the Levitical, by the latter, the gospel-economy. Others, the persons belonging to each of these, the synagogue and the church: but, I presume, no interpretation will better suit the design of the argument, and the intent of those other passages where the like expression occurs, than that of the Jewish tabernacle or sanctuary, and heaven itself.

There lies indeed one difficulty against this exposition; it seeming harsh to say that heaven, the region and source of all purity, should itself either need or receive cleansing or purification from any sacrifice whatsoever. But this will be removed, if we attend to the true intent of the word, with regard to the tabernacle and sanctuary. Now these and all the utensils belonging to them were consecrated in most solemn manner, and could not be rendered more holy by the frequent sprinklings of the blood of the sacrifices. The blemishes then, and stains done away by them, were the impurities, not of the place, but of the persons approaching it; and the altar and sanctuary were then said to be purified, when the priests and people were put in a due legal capacity of holding communion with Almighty God there. By parity of reason, and, in allusion to those types, heaven may be thought *purified*, (according to the Levitical construction of the word,) when the bodies and souls of men designed to approach God there are washed from the pollution of their sins, which incapacitated them for that blessed dwelling; and, being sprinkled with the blood of the Lamb, are qualified for being brought into the presence of him who accepts them in the Beloved. This is a privilege which he only could confer; a cleansing, which no other sacrifice ever did, ever could effect. A point at large asserted in the Scriptures very fitly read to us at and about this season; and formerly assigned to this, as a proper time for taking it into consideration.

Now in this point there are two parts contained, the insufficiency of the legal, first; and then, the perfection and efficacy of the evangelical sacrifice. Somewhat concerning each of these, with all convenient brevity and plainness.

1. First, for the insufficiency of the legal sacrifices; this Epistle contains sundry arguments which are very clear and full proofs of it. In the seventh chapter, by shewing that the law is changed by reason of its being defective in this respect, and grounding this inference upon those passages of the Old Testament which speak of the Messiah, not only as a priest more excellent than any other, but as a priest descended of a tribe none of which had any right to minister in holy things, and of an order altogether distinct from and foreign to the constitution of the Levitical economy. Observe the author's reasoning: *“If perfection were by the Levitical priesthood, (for under it*

the people received the law.) what further need was there that another priest should rise after the order of Melchisedec, and not be called after the order of Aaron? For the priesthood being changed, there is made of necessity a change also of the law. For he of whom these things are spoken pertaineth to another tribe, of which no man gave attendance at the altar. For it is evident that our Lord sprang out of Judah; of which tribe Moses spake nothing concerning priesthood. And it is yet far more evident: for that after the similitude of Melchisedec there ariseth another priest, who is made, not after the law of a carnal commandment, but after the power of an endless life. For he testifieth, Thou art a priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec. For there is verily a disannulling of the commandment going before for the weakness and unprofitableness thereof. For the law made nothing perfect, but the bringing in of a better hope did; by the which we draw nigh unto God.

He proves it again in the eighth chapter, from the forgiveness of sins, and the more complete knowledge of God and man's duty, being by their own prophets foretold, as blessings properly belonging to a new covenant which God in its proper season promised to make with them^d. And the consequence he draws from hence is, that God *finds fault with and abolishes the old; that if that first covenant had been faultless, then should no place have been sought for the second^e*. And thus he establishes the truth of what he had affirmed just before, that Christ *'hath obtained a more excellent ministry, by how much also he is the mediator of a better covenant, which was established upon better promises*. So agreeable is all this to the observation of St. Paul elsewhere, that if *righteousness had come by the law, then Christ is dead in vain; i. e. upon this supposition, there was no manner of need for that death; and all the provision for pardon made by it, and all the weight laid upon it, end in the most superfluous, the most absurd contrivance that ever was in the world.*

In this ninth, and at the beginning of the tenth chapter, the apostle produces a farther evidence of the insufficiency of those legal sacrifices^h; particularly of that most solemn one in the great day of atonement; in that they were by express order frequently repeated. Some of them making a part of the daily worship, others having their stated returns upon particular days and occasions. *'The priests (he urges) went always into the first tabernacle, accomplishing the service of God. But into the second went the high priest alone once every year, not without blood, which he offered for himself, and for the errors of the people^k*. From whence he draws the following inference, that *the law can never with those sacrifices which are offered year by year continually make the comers thereunto perfect. For then would they not (the meaning is, undoubtedly they would) have ceased to be offered? because that the worshippers once purged should have had no more conscience of sins. But in those sacrifices there is a remembrance again made of sins every year^l*. This rendered them not so properly cures as convictions of guilt, and representations rather than remedies of the sinner's danger.

^d Heb. viii. 8-12.^e Ver. 7, 8.^f Ver. 6.^g Gal. ii. 21.^h Heb. x. 11.ⁱ Ch. ix. 6.^k Ch. x. 6.^l Ch. x. 1-3.

Each repetition confessed the impotence of the former act, and reproached that ordinance with weakness which left men under a necessity of fresh expiations. Nor will it suffice to answer, (as the Jews do upon this occasion,) that where the sins themselves are repented, it is needful that the propitiations for them should be so too. For the certain character of a perfect sacrifice is to be of inherent and eternal efficacy; not limited to times, not invalidated by the return of the disease; not to be offered, but only to be applied anew, by such acts of faith and contrition as the party's infirmities or relapses shall render expedient, for making that effectual to him in particular, whose efficacy in itself, and generally speaking, is perpetual.

Thus are the legal sacrifices convicted of disability; and the other branch of the matter now before us, the sufficiency of the evangelical sacrifice, is at the same time established, by having those very perfections attributed to it, which are so justly denied to the legal when set in opposition to it. For to this purpose it is that so much care is taken for shewing our Lord's to be an endless priesthood^m; that the blood he shed as our Mediator in this affair is styled *the blood of the everlasting covenant*; that he is said to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself in these last daysⁿ, and in the end of the world^o, (that is, as I have formerly explained those terms, in this dispensation, to which no other shall, because no better can, succeed,) that he shall indeed come again, but not as he did before^p; not to be made sin (that is, in the quality of a sin-offering) for us any more; but without sin, without any such propitiatory sacrifice, unto salvation^q, to bestow the blessings purchased at his first coming; not then a redeemer, but as a rewarder of persons already completely redeemed. Hence so much stress is laid upon this offering being not made often, because the force of it is so far above needing any repetition: *He by his own blood entered in once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us. He hath appeared once to take away sin, and was once offered to bear the sins of many.* *We are sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.* And this man after he had offered one sacrifice for sins, for ever sat down on the right hand of God. For by one offering he hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified. The merit and influence of this oblation was not confined to the age in which it was made, but had a retrospect to generations long since past and gone, and supplied the deficiencies of former dispensations. For therefore is Christ *the mediator of the new testament, that by means of death, for the redemption of the transgressions under the first testament, they which are called might receive the promise of eternal inheritance.* And it looks forward to all generations yet unborn, for the *promise* (says St. Peter) *is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call.* And he (says St. Paul) *being made perfect, and consecrated for evermore, became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him*; for

^m Heb. v. 6.
Christmas-day.

ⁿ Ch. xiii. 20.
^r Heb. ix. 28.

^u Ch. ix. 15.

^o Ch. i. 2.

^p Ch. ix. 12, 26, 28.

^x Acts ii. 39.

^q Ch. ix. 26.

^t Ch. x. 10, 12, 14.

^v Heb. v. 9.

^q Epistle for

he is able to save them to the uttermost that come to God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them². In a word, on this account are the sacraments of the Christian religion memorials of a propitiation already made, and applications of its efficacy, and testimonies of our faith and thankfulness: not any offering of Christ again, but an offering of ourselves to God, by and for him.

There is yet one argument behind, which the apostle insists upon with great force, taken from the reason and nature of the thing. For thus we find him confining the effect of bulls and goats slain in sacrifice to the *purifying of the flesh*, but ascribing to the blood of Christ alone that of *cleansing the conscience from dead works*. And, in terms yet more expressive and peremptory, pronouncing it *not possible that the blood of bulls and goats should take away sin*. The strength and ground of which assertion we shall best understand, by observing what is meant in Scripture by *taking away sin*, and then by that impossibility of doing so which the legal sacrifices are here concluded under.

Now to *take away sin* is a phrase, which in Scripture language denotes the freeing any person from the guilt of sins already committed, so as that they shall not any more be charged to him in account, or he suffer the punishment otherwise due for them. And when, as here it is, applied to sacrifices, the meaning is, that such punishment is so far inflicted on them, that God accepts the death of the sacrifice, and in consideration of this remits the death of the offender in whose behalf and stead such sacrifice was slain. That then which the apostle asserts comes to thus much: that Christ, by offering himself and dying for mankind, hath released us from the guilt and punishment of our sins; but that the beasts slain in sacrifice under the law did not by their death release men, nay, that they could not possibly do so.

By which expression, as I have lately had occasion to explain it, we need not, we must not understand an absolute impossibility; as if God could not either remit sins without any satisfaction at all, or accept any that he thought fit, how mean and worthless soever in itself. For who shall presume to limit the supreme Governor's prerogative, or prescribe to the goodness and wisdom of a Being infinite in every perfection? But the meaning is, that according to the scheme upon which God all along hath acted, and considering him in the quality of a Lawgiver and a Judge, a nobler compensation was necessary; and for the blood of beasts to have been accepted in lieu of the punishment due for the sins of men, had been extremely incongruous, and such a method of remission as the ends and measures of government could not have been answered by.

The design of every wise governor is to contain men in their duty, by enacting such laws as may be a rule for their obedience, and enforcing those laws with such punishments as shall render the breach of them terrible and exemplary; that others may be deterred from doing the like, that they who have already offended may be afraid to

² Heb. vii. 21, 25.

^a Ch. ix. 13, 14.

^b Ch. x. 4.

do so again, and that a just reverence for the constitution may be preserved and maintained.

To these purposes Almighty God, having made man immortal, gave him a law, the transgression whereof he threatened with death, of which we all have naturally the utmost abhorrence and dread. That law being broken by our first parents, they, and in them human nature, became obnoxious to the curse. To preserve his workmanship in so noble a part of the creation from perishing, it pleased God to accept of a vicarious punishment. But since God still continues to govern us by laws, it was expedient this should be such a one as still to serve the ends above mentioned. Which does not appear possible to be done by admitting the death of beasts, but is effectually done by receiving the death of Christ, as an expiation for the guilt and punishment of sinners.

For what apprehension of Divine vengeance, what terror, what example can there be in the death of a brute? Which cannot be of any great consequence to us, or stir any very tender passion in us. To see a creature die, when devoted to a holy use, will not much affect them who every day kill the like for their own sustenance and refreshment. To purchase pardon at so cheap a rate would rather render men licentious, and encourage their wickedness, and expose their laws and governor to contempt; but could never produce reformation of manners, or any sort of reverence for such an institution. For when assaulted by temptations, any who allow themselves leisure to think on such occasions will presently set to computing the damage like to follow by unlawful compliances. And if it be found, upon balancing the account, that a bullock or a sheep is all the loss they have to fear, few sins bid so low as not to gain them over. And the affront to the majesty of God is not likely to be esteemed great, or the honour for his ordinances worth any very nice regard, when so poor a reparation is taken up with, and the quarrel compounded, without any personal pain, and at so despicably slight expense.

On the contrary, God, by accepting no less a compensation for the sins of men than the death and passion of his own innocent and beloved Son, hath given us the clearest idea of the heinousness of sin, and the fierceness of his anger against it. And by the dismal circumstances of that passion he hath rendered the punishment of it most exemplary, hath awakened our fears, and put us upon our guard against that ruin and misery which must needs be insupportable to the guilty, when the weight of his wrath lay so heavy upon one who had none of their remorse and despair to sink him. For how shall sinners be able to endure to all eternity the unrelenting strokes of that provoked justice, which he who had no fault to reproach himself with found so hard to be borne for a few hours only? And greater right was done to his laws and his honour by God in bruising this excellent person so sorely, than if each transgressor and affronter of them had actually perished for his own iniquities. For what are millions of us in comparison of him? And how could God secure a respect to his laws, like that which results from a ransom so inestimably precious,

and the high terms upon which alone he was content that we should be retrieved from everlasting destruction? These things are so very plain, and have been heretofore so largely spoken to, that I may very well forbear any farther proof of them at this time.

But besides, there is in all this dispensation an exact congruity observed, which could not be in any other sacrifices. Human nature had sinned, and was it not fit that human nature should suffer? Beasts are nothing to us; but Jesus, in condescending to become one of us, gave us thereby a part and interest in all he did and suffered. Here was equity as well as condescension, that the same nature which suffered in him should receive in us the benefit of its sufferings. Nor does it appear how that benefit could ever accrue to us from the sufferings of any nature inferior to our own. For death being ordained the punishment of sin, the effect of remission of sin must be immortal life. And could the death of any creature, not immortal itself, procure for us a right to immortality? No. The sacrifice that takes away sin must not only die, but live again; must be able to give itself immortality, before we can be immortal by virtue of it. And this proves that such sacrifice must at last be man, must be an innocent man, must indeed be much more than man, must be God as well as man. For the Scripture is express, that God *only hath immortality*. And it is evident to common sense, that a being which itself hath not immortality cannot give it to others.

By this time, I hope, the apostle's reasoning is clear, even to a demonstration, wherein he asserts the weakness and inefficacy of the Levitical and every other sacrifice, and the sufficiency and perfection of Christ's, the evangelical, the only efficacious, the only true one. And how can we enough admire the riches of that grace, which chose this method of making his glory so conspicuous, in every adorable attribute concerned in this great work? Most truly does the apostle declare that Jesus Christ *is become to us wisdom and righteousness and sanctification, as well as redemption*^d. O may these kind intentions be accomplished in every soul, and may that *God of peace, that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus Christ, that great Shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, make us perfect in every good work to do his will, working in us that which is well-pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ; to whom be glory for ever and ever*. Amen.

THE GOSPEL. St. Luke xxii.

¹ Now the feast of unleavened bread drew nigh, which is called the Passover.

² And the chief priests and scribes sought how they might kill him; for they feared the people.

³ Then entered Satan into Judas surnamed Iscariot, being of the number of the twelve.

^c 1 Tim. vi. 16.

^d 1 Cor. i. 30.

^e Heb. xiii. 20, 21.

4 And he went his way, and communed with the chief priests and captains, how he might betray him unto them.

5 And they were glad, and covenanted to give him money.

6 And he promised, and sought opportunity to betray him unto them in the absence of the multitude.

7 Then came the day of unleavened bread, when the passover must be killed.

8 And he sent Peter and John, saying, Go and prepare us the passover, that we may eat.

9 And they said unto him, Where wilt thou that we prepare?

10 And he said unto them, Behold, when ye are entered into the city, there shall a man meet you, bearing a pitcher of water; follow him into the house where he entereth in.

11 And ye shall say unto the goodman of the house, The Master saith unto thee, Where is the guestchamber, where I shall eat the passover with my disciples?

12 And he shall shew you a large upper room furnished: there make ready.

13 And they went, and found as he had said unto them: and they made ready the passover.

14 And when the hour was come, he sat down, and the twelve apostles with him.

15 And he said unto them, With desire I have desired to eat this passover with you before I suffer:

16 For I say unto you, I will not any more eat thereof, until it be fulfilled in the kingdom of God.

17 And he took the cup, and gave thanks, and said, Take this, and divide it among yourselves:

18 For I say unto you, I will not drink of the fruit of the vine, until the kingdom of God shall come.

19 And he took bread, and gave thanks, and brake it, and gave unto them, saying, This is my body which is given for you: this do in remembrance of me.

20 Likewise also the cup after supper, saying, This cup is the new testament in my blood, which is shed for you.

21 But, behold, the hand of him that betrayeth me is with me on the table.

22 And truly the Son of man goeth, as it was determined: but woe unto that man by whom he is betrayed!

23 And they began to enquire among themselves, which of them it was that should do this thing.

24 And there was also a strife among them, which of them should be accounted the greatest.

25 And he said unto them, The kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them; and they that exercise authority upon them are called benefactors.

26 But ye shall not be so: but he that is greatest among you, let him be as the younger; and he that is chief, as he that doth serve.

27 For whether is greater, he that sitteth at meat, or he that serveth? is not he that sitteth at meat? but I am among you as he that serveth.

28 *Ye are they which have continued with me in my temptations.*

29 *And I appoint unto you a kingdom, as my Father hath appointed unto me ;*

30 *That ye may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom, and sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel.*

31 *And the Lord said, Simon, Simon, behold, Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat :*

32 *But I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not : and when thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren.*

33 *And he said unto him, Lord, I am ready to go with thee, both into prison, and to death.*

34 *And he said, I tell thee, Peter, the cock shall not crow this day, before that thou shalt thrice deny that thou knowest me.*

35 *And he said unto them, When I sent you without purse, and scrip, and shoes, lacked ye anything ? And they said, Nothing.*

36 *Then said he unto them, But now, he that hath a purse, let him take it, and likewise his scrip : and he that hath no sword, let him sell his garment, and buy one.*

37 *For I say unto you, that this that is written must yet be accomplished in me, And he was reckoned among the transgressors : for the things concerning me have an end.*

38 *And they said, Lord, behold, here are two swords, And he said unto them, It is enough.*

39 *And he came out, and went, as he was wont, to the mount of Olives ; and his disciples also followed him.*

40 *And when he was at the place, he said unto them, Pray that ye enter not into temptation.*

41 *And he was withdrawn from them about a stone's cast, and kneeled down, and prayed.*

42 *Saying, Father, If thou be willing, remove this cup from me : nevertheless not my will, but thine, be done.*

43 *And there appeared an angel unto him from heaven, strengthening him.*

44 *And being in an agony he prayed more earnestly : and his sweat was as it were great drops of blood falling down to the ground.*

45 *And when he rose up from prayer, and was come to his disciples, he found them sleeping for sorrow,*

46 *And said unto them, Why sleep ye ? rise and pray, lest ye enter into temptation.*

47 *And while he yet spake, behold a multitude, and he that was called Judas, one of the twelve, went before them, and drew near unto Jesus to kiss him.*

48 *But Jesus said unto him, Judas, betrayest thou the Son of man with a kiss ?*

49 *When they which were about him saw what would follow, they said unto him, Lord, shall we smite with the sword ?*

50 *And one of them smote the servant of the high priest, and cut off his right ear.*

51 *And Jesus answered and said, Suffer ye thus far. And he touched his ear, and healed him.*

52 *Then Jesus said unto the chief priests, and captains of the temple, and the elders, which were come to him, Be ye come out, as against a thief, with swords and staves?*

53 *When I was daily with you in the temple, ye stretched forth no hands against me: but this is your hour, and the power of darkness.*

54 *Then took they him, and led him, and brought him into the high priest's house. And Peter followed afar off.*

55 *And when they had kindled a fire in the midst of the hall, and were set down together, Peter sat down among them.*

56 *But a certain maid beheld him as he sat by the fire, and earnestly looked upon him, and said, This man was also with him.*

57 *And he denied him, saying, Woman, I know him not.*

58 *And after a little while another saw him, and said, Thou art also of them. And Peter said, Man, I am not.*

59 *And about the space of one hour after another confidently affirmed, saying, Of a truth this fellow also was with him: for he is a Galilæan.*

60 *And Peter said, Man, I know not what thou sayest. And immediately, while he yet spake, the cock crew.*

61 *And the Lord turned, and looked upon Peter. And Peter remembered the word of the Lord, how he had said unto him, Before the cock crew, thou shalt deny me thrice.*

62 *And Peter went out, and wept bitterly.*

63 *And the men that held Jesus mocked him, and smote him.*

64 *And when they had blindfolded him, they struck him on the face, and asked him, saying, Prophecy, who is it that smote thee?*

65 *And many other things blasphemously spake they against him.*

66 *And as soon as it was day, the elders of the people and the chief priests and the scribes came together, and led him into their council, saying,*

67 *Art thou the Christ? tell us. And he said unto them, If I tell you, ye will not believe:*

68 *And if I also ask you, ye will not answer me, nor let me go.*

69 *Hereafter shall the Son of man sit on the right hand of the power of God.*

70 *Then said they all, Art thou then the Son of God? And he said unto them, Ye say that I am.*

71 *And they said, What need we any further witness? for we ourselves have heard of his own mouth.*

COMMENT.

My purpose is at present to treat of the Lord's Supper: of which this Gospel relates the institution, and the Church requires from every member of proper years and understanding a devout participation at the approaching festival of Easter.

The many useful tracts upon this subject (some one whereof, at least, is almost in every hand) have rendered any great enlargement of mine unnecessary. That therefore which will best agree with the

nature of this work, and abundantly suffice for the design I have in view, is,

First, to consider the manner and the end of instituting this sacrament; and then,

Secondly, to draw from thence some practical reflections with relation to it.

In both these I intend to be very brief and plain; and to frame my discourse entirely upon our own communion service: than which, if carefully attended to, I am bold to affirm, all the volumes that have been (or perhaps that ever shall be) written on this occasion cannot give more clear and pious and profitable instructions.

I begin with the manner of instituting this sacrament. The first remarkable circumstance in which is, its being done at the close of the paschal supper. That (I need not say) was ordained as a yearly commemoration of God's great mercy in sparing the families of the Israelites, when his angel destroyed the firstborn of the Egyptians: and so bringing off his own people in safety and triumph from a state of bondage and insupportable misery. This blessing, great as it was, did yet prefigure one infinitely greater, which all mankind were now about to receive by the death of Christ. Who, in allusion to that eminent type, is called *'the Lamb of God; and our passover'*: he therefore, having first satisfied the law in celebrating the Jewish, proceeds to substitute another feast in its room; that, as the rest of their imperfect ordinances were swallowed up in him, so the commemoration of the * substance might give place to that of the image. Whereby it is easy to perceive not only the fitness of such an appointment in general, but the great affinity it had to a former establishment, and the seasonableness of appointing this sacrament at that time.

Secondly, our Lord upon this occasion *took bread, and blessed, and brake it, and said, This is my body which is given (and broken) for you.* Here again is a very near resemblance to the rites of the Jewish passover: in which the master of the family was wont in general to give God solemn thanks for the fruits of the earth; acknowledging him to be the creator and bestower of them: and then applying himself to the occasion of that festival, and taking the unleavened bread into his hand, he said, *This is the bread of affliction, which our fathers did eat in Egypt.* A form, which must in all reason be admitted for the best key to that so very near of kin to it, by which our Saviour consecrated bread to a sacramental use under the new testament. And seems plainly to signify, that neither the one nor the other is strictly and literally the thing it is called; but a memorial only and representation of that thing whose name it bears. Nor was it indeed possible that the bread in Christ's hand could be in reality his body broken, at a time when his body was not yet broken; but the breaking of the bread was a proper figure and a lively image of those wounds and breaches which were about to be made in his body. Thus it was to those disciples then; and thus it is now to us, by representing them

* substance—image] Perhaps the author wrote *image—substance.*

f John i. 29; 1 Cor. v. 7.

g Ver. 19; 1 Cor. xi. 24.

already made. And of this manner of speech the Scripture furnishes other instances in cases of like nature: as God himself to Abraham says of circumcision, ^h*This is my covenant*, though Abraham was not then actually circumcised. And when he was so, it is evident from St. Paul that circumcision never was the covenant itself, but only the evidence and seal of itⁱ. And Moses in like manner says of the paschal lamb, ^k*It is the Lord's passover*, when yet the Lord had not passed over their dwellings till that lamb was actually killed, and their doors sprinkled with its blood. And afterwards, that lamb could be no other than the memorial of his passing over them. So clearly it appears that the sign hath often the title of the thing signified; and that it hath the name and significance of a thing to be done, as well as of a thing already done. This is a figure usual in any case, but most natural, and in a manner necessary, where a sacrament is the subject. The very condition of which implies that the thing representing and that represented by it be different; it being manifestly absurd to make any thing a sign of itself. And that we might lie under no temptation to understand our Saviour's words in a sense different from those other forms I mentioned, he seems to have sufficiently explained his own meaning by that addition, *Do this (take, and break, and eat bread) in remembrance of me*. To which interpretation St. Paul agrees exactly, as I shall have occasion to observe by and by.

3. The same is to be said, thirdly, concerning the other part of this sacrament. Where our blessed Saviour, ^l*after supper, took the cup, and when he had given thanks, he gave it to them, saying, Drink ye all of this, for this is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for you and for many, for the remission of sins*. Or, as St. Luke expresses it in the Gospel now before us, *This cup is the new testament in my blood, which is shed for you*. The cup here corresponds to the Jews' cup of blessing at the close of the paschal feast; which is now converted to a nobler and better signification in the use Christians are commanded to make of it. But by the manner of expression it is evident that by the cup was intended the wine in it; that this wine is *the blood of the new testament*, or *the new testament in Christ's blood*, no farther than as it represents and commemorates that blood, and the covenant ratified by the shedding of it. Which blood yet was not shed at the time when this cup first received that denomination. And therefore here again, to set us right, St. Paul adds those other words of our Lord at the consecration of it, ^m*Do this, as oft as ye shall drink it, in remembrance of me*.

Thus did our Lord the night before his passion, thus do his servants, the ministers of his gospel, at every celebration of his blessed supper, separate and sanctify the elements of bread and wine to a religious purpose. So changing them in their use and significance, and devoting them to the more immediate service of God. In this regard they are no longer what they were before, common food to

^h Gen. xvii. 10.ⁱ Rom. iv. 11.^k Exod. xii. 11.^l Matt. xvi. 27, 28.^m 1 Cor. xi.

our bodies only, but they become holy memorials of our redemption, the strength and nourishment of souls, and a feast of thanksgiving set forth upon our Lord's own table. The mention whereof puts me in mind to proceed to the second branch of the first general head; the end, I mean, of this happy institution, which our church hath declared to be twofold, in those words of her solemn exhortation: *To the end we should always remember the exceeding great love of our Master and only Saviour Jesus Christ thus dying for us, and the innumerable benefits which by his precious bloodshedding he hath obtained to us, he hath instituted and ordained holy mysteries, as pledges of his love, and for a continual remembrance of his death, to our great and endless comfort.* Now here,

First, let us consider these mysteries as pledges of his love. The principal and most valuable effects of Christ's love to mankind are blessings of a spiritual and invisible nature. And because to men, who in those bodies must lead lives of sense, it is difficult to entertain a firm persuasion of things which do not affect their bodily organs, therefore it hath pleased God all along to make use of sacraments in religion. That is (as our Church in her Catechism rightly defines) *outward and visible signs of inward and spiritual grace, ordained by our Lord himself, as means whereby we receive the same, and pledges to assure us thereof.* These then we are commanded to apply, as the methods made choice of to convey us to the benefits they betoken: these we are to confide in as effectual for that purpose; and to rest assured that the mercies represented by them are as certainly imparted by and with them, as those very signs are which we see and feel and taste: these again we are to consider as having that efficacy and significance, not from any natural force and tendency of their own, but purely from the ordinance and institution of God, who appointed the use of them for such particular purposes.

It is farther observable, concerning all the ordinances of this kind, that they began to take place upon some new conditions of obedience imposed, and as confirmations to promises of some signal advantage, propounded as a reward of compliance with the change or addition of such conditions. The instances themselves make this exceeding plain; for such are to be reckoned the tree of life in paradise to our first parents: the bow in the cloud to Noah, after the flood: circumcision to Abraham, upon separating him and his posterity to be God's peculiar: the passover, and other Levitical sacrifices, upon enacting the law: and to us Christians, baptism and the Lord's supper, at the promulgation of the gospel. All agreeing thus far, that by the impressions made upon our bodily senses from objects fit to affect them, all doubt might be removed concerning those benefits, of which our senses can have no perception, and which do therefore challenge a right to our faith, (the only principle qualified to apprehend them,) when evidence of them is made by such marks and emblems as, when rightly used, God hath determined to bestow them in company with.

And this I take to be the true reason of that particular presence of Christ in the sacraments, above what is usually attributed to other

parts of religious worship; the inseparable conjunction of the thing signified with the sign when rightly administered; and the sensible proof of that invisible benefit made by visible signs; for such the sacraments exhibit to us, but other acts of religious worship are destitute of. This also seems to be the apostle's meaning in that text to the Corinthians; *"The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ?"* The cup and bread at the holy table are then the means of exhibiting and rendering us partakers of his *body broken and his blood*, (or as himself, according to St. Luke, was pleased to phrase it,) *the new testament in his blood, shed for us*. Of which if we will speak intelligibly, and so as may agree with the terms whereby the evangelists and St. Paul have severally described the act of institution, it must be to like effect with the words of our church in her thanksgivings after the communion. That here we hope, *"by the merits and death of Jesus Christ, and through faith in his blood, to obtain remission of our sins, and all other benefits of his passion*. Or (as the other form yet more expressly) that them *who have duly received these holy mysteries, God hath vouchsafed to feed with the spiritual food of the most precious body and blood of his Son our Saviour Jesus Christ; and doth assure them thereby of his favour and goodness toward them; and that they are very members incorporate in the mystical body of his Son, which is the blessed company of all faithful people; and are also heirs through hope of his everlasting kingdom, by the merits of the most precious death and passion of his dear Son*. Since then, by communicating in the consecrated elements, we partake in the *body and blood of Christ*, that is, since all the advantages which his death was intended to procure for mankind are here exhibited and sealed to every worthy receiver in particular, no doubt can be made whether these holy mysteries be not deservedly styled *pledges of our dear Redeemer's love*.

2. The other end of instituting this sacrament is, that it may be a *continual remembrance of Christ's death*. This likewise is manifest, not only from those words of our blessed Saviour himself, *Do this in remembrance of me*; but by those also of St. Paul, *As oft as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew forth the Lord's death till he come*. If we consider the circumstances of the first Christians, their hardships and persecutions for the faith of Christ, it must be acknowledged that their making this so constant a part of their solemn worship was an instance of a more than common zeal. The natural construction of such a practice amounting in truth to no less than a declaration, that they were neither afraid nor ashamed to confess themselves the disciples of a crucified Lord; notwithstanding all the cruelty and contempt, which, it was foreseen, such confession would not fail of exposing them to. It were to be wished that any age, that ours in particular, had so just a reverence for Christ and his religion, as might make such open attestations of our adherence to him cease to be, even in

this respect, necessary. But supposing the whole world agreed in the regards due to Christ and his doctrine, yet would the most public declarations of our thanks still continue a duty. And, since he hath himself prescribed a method for preserving the great things done and suffered upon our account fresh in the memories of men, it will very ill become them, who are so infinitely indebted to his kindness, to decline remembering him in the way of his own choosing. Accordingly we find this always looked upon as the mark of distinction for his servants and followers; the admission to it esteemed their highest privilege and comfort, the exclusion from it, upon any notorious crime, dreaded and lamented, as the most grievous of all calamities; and a direful omen of such persons being debarred entrance into the kingdom of heaven, if it should please God to take them away in that miserable state: an argument indeed, that they had *neither part nor lot* in the sufferings which they were judged unworthy to commemorate. For all remembrance of this kind supposes an interest in, and title to, the blessings men remember. And the matter is greatly mistaken by them who suppose that every calling of Christ and his death to mind is sufficient to answer the purposes of this institution. For though our Lord have mentioned no other use of this sacrament expressly, besides that of remembering him; yet does this singly, when considered as it ought to be, imply all those pious acts and dispositions, which the treatises of divines upon this sacrament are usually observed to require, as necessary preparations to it. And this it is my design to explain and prove under my second general head, which I promised should consist of,

II. Some practical reflections relating to this matter.

Now, first, by remembering Christ and his death, is implied a remembrance of the end for which he died. Which the Scriptures acquaint us was *to take away sin by the sacrifice of himself*; to deliver us from the guilt and punishment of it, by suffering in our stead; and to set us at liberty from the dominion of it, by the assistances of his grace. But the Scriptures do as plainly inform us, that these benefits are confined to the penitent only; and therefore to pretend to this remembrance, without sincere endeavours to promote that end, is mockery and affront to his sufferings. Consequently the remembrance of Christ's death in this sacrament is an obligation to hearty sorrow for our sins already past, to steadfast purposes of living better for the time to come, and to actual amendment in pursuit of those good purposes.

Secondly, he who remembers Christ dying for him, is supposed to have a due sense of the merit and efficacy of that death: to believe that God hath accepted it in full satisfaction to his offended justice, and set him forth as a propitiation, in whom we have forgiveness and acceptance. Consequently, he approaches this table with assured persuasion that the great work of redemption is accomplished; and by this persuasion he feels himself invigorated and actuated perpetually. It is like the soul in his body, animating every part: it influences

his whole behaviour, supports him under trials, arms him against temptations, silences his doubts, lays the disquiet of fears and misgivings to sleep, banishes despair utterly; and shews him to himself, though most polluted and unworthy when considered abstractedly and alone; yet, when considered as one for whom Christ died, the purchase of that blood, which could not be shed in vain, and sure to be accepted in and for the beloved Son of God. And thus he attains to another qualification, declared to be necessary upon our approaches to the blessed table, *a lively and steadfast faith in Christ our Saviour.*

Thirdly, he that remembers the death of Christ, in our Lord's meaning, recollects that *his blood was shed and his body broken* for him and for many; or as St. John, in terms yet more extensive, that *he is the propitiation, not for his sins only, but also for the sins of the whole world*.¹ And this reflection cannot fail to awaken those endearments which naturally grow from men's being involved in the same common danger and misery, and partaking in the same common deliverance. It will put us in mind, how by suffering in our nature he hath united all who share that nature to himself; it will represent the friendship due to them who are thus made heirs of the same hope, sons of the same family, members of the same body, washed in the same baptism, fed at the same table, with ourselves. This is the inference made of it by St. Paul, *'We being many are one bread, and one body: for we are all partakers of that one bread.'* It will, in a word, expose most sensibly the wickedness, the absurdity of hatred or revenge, or any malicious grudge; of scorn or contempt, or coldness or neglect, to any for whom Christ did not disdain to die, as well as for us. And thus we shall arrive at a third necessary predisposition to communicating worthily, that of being in *perfect charity with all men.*

Fourthly, remembering Christ and his death, does once more presume a man sensible that he must have been miserable to all eternity without it; that this was an admirable contrivance for the snatching a whole world out of the jaws of death and hell; that it was an instance of unparalleled mercy in God the Father, a most amazing condescension in God the Son: that they are even monsters of ingratitude, who read and hear and reflect who it was that died, and what he endured, and for whom; and see the happy consequences of his sufferings; if they do not feel their hearts wonderfully excited to acknowledge and magnify, and publish the praises of their Benefactor and only Saviour; if they do not love him in return, or think any thing too much that he thinks fit to require as a testimony of their love. And since a person so far above us is not capable of being thanked any other way, if they do not make it their constant study to express the grateful sentiments they have of this inestimable mercy by acts of reverence and devotion, diligence to serve and obey him, and the strictest care never to displease or grieve him. This is a temper of mind which the reason of the thing proves to be our duty at all times. But at the seasons of partaking in our Lord's body and

¹ 1 John ii. 2.

² 1 Cor. x. 17.

blood, it is so essential, so exceeding necessary, that then, *above all things, we must give most humble and hearty thanks to God, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, for the redemption of the world by the death and passion of our Saviour Christ, both God and man; who did humble himself even to the death upon the cross, for us, miserable sinners, who lay in darkness and the shadow of death; that he might make us the children of God, and exalt us to everlasting life.*

Such is the preparation requisite to this holy sacrament, consisting of habits and dispositions, which whosoever is destitute of cannot be a good Christian. And therefore these are not to be acquired, but strengthened only and refreshed, when men come hither. And since in the working these up to as high a degree as we are able, consists the perfection of a Christian life, it must needs be of great use and strong obligation that we lose no convenience of doing it. The neglect and the careless receiving of the Lord's supper are the inlets to all manner of evil; and I know not whether the scandalous corruption of our own age and people be more justly imputable to any cause, than the long and general disuse of this sacrament, introduced by the confusions and hypocrisy of the last century. Meanwhile, since this holy ordinance hath been proved, not only a remembrance of our Lord's death commanded to be perpetual, but also a sure pledge of his love; how barbarous are we to our own souls, in denying them the best, the most lasting comfort, of frequently rejoicing in those ravishing hopes and assurances, here most effectually cherished! If not for Christ's sake then, (which yet were most unthankful and base,) at least for our own, (which not to do were most inhuman and stupid,) let us beware of affronting so good a Lord by refusing his invitations to so much mercy; and of drawing upon ourselves the punishment of those unworthy wretches, who went *'one to his farm, another to his merchandise,* till they at last were finally excluded from the *"marriage feast of the great King."*

Lastly, from what hath gone before on this occasion, it is very obvious to observe the reasonableness of that rubric in our liturgy which contains so general a command of communicating at Easter. For, when indeed can it be more properly done than at this holy season? when may we expect more plentiful supplies of grace, when do we put ourselves more directly in the way of it, than by thus doing honour to that body and blood broken and shed for us at the very time when it was actually broken and shed?

If ever our devotions can be exalted to a pitch in any degree worthy of those blessed mysteries, sure it must be then, when the repeated contemplation of our Lord's glorious achievements for us have raised our heavy souls and put them on the wing. If ever our faith in Christ be lively and steadfast, it is then most like to be so when we celebrate his conquest over death and hell, and take courage from the rout now given to his enemies and ours. If ever we be touched with deep and tender remorse, and melt into penitential tears, and heartily abhor our

faults and follies, and ourselves for them, sure this will be the effect of reading, hearing, recollecting our dear Redeemer's sufferings, the bitterness of his bodily pains, the anguish of his soul, and the dreadful punishment inflicted upon sin in his person. If ever the love of Christ commit a holy violence upon our hearts, and *constrain us to obedience*; when are we so prepared to submit to and be vanquished by it as now, that Jesus Christ is crucified in our ears and before our eyes for a whole week together, and hath thereby so fully possessed us with ideas of his most astonishing kindness and condescension?

So fit, so advantageous a time is this of feeding on the body of our Lord, so scandalous is it not now to *do this* in remembrance of him; so much to be feared that they do not remember Christ at all to purpose, who refuse this respect to his command, his person, his sufferings, and cannot be prevailed upon to remember him in the method of his own appointing.

THURSDAY BEFORE EASTER.

THE EPISTLE. 1 Cor. xi. 17.

17 *In this that I declare unto you I praise you not, that ye come together not for the better, but for the worse.*

17. One thing I am about to mention, which deserves great blame: it is the disorderly manner of your meeting together upon religious accounts.

18 *For first of all, when ye come together in the church, I hear that there be divisions among you; and I partly believe it.*

18. For I am told that in these assemblies there are some of you who divide from the rest and eat separately; and this I believe to be true of some of you.

19 *For there must be also heresies among you, that they which are approved may be made manifest among you.*

19. For such divisions, which are the natural effect of men's pride, and other

sinful divisions, God permits to take place in the church; as for other reasons, so for this particularly, that they who are truly good men may hereby have opportunity of shewing it, and of distinguishing themselves from the bad.

20 *When ye come together therefore into one place, this is not to eat the Lord's supper.*

20. When therefore you meet in such a disorderly manner, this is not behaving

yourselves like men who come to the Lord's supper; for that is a feast of love, in which every person in the congregation hath an equal right to communicate.

21 *For in eating every one taketh before other his own supper: and one is hungry, and another is drunken.*

21. For your practice is, that instead of making this one common regular table,

they who come first eat first, and they who contribute much eat much: so that some are sent away empty, who had little or nothing to bring; and others, who bring in plenty, eat and drink to excess.

22 *What? have ye not houses to eat*

22. If such distinctions

and to drink in? or despise ye the church of God, and shame them that have not? What shall I say to you? shall I praise you in this? I praise you not.

the public congregation, by exposing the poverty of those Christians who are on such occasions all upon the same level? This is a corruption which deserves very sharp reproof.

23 For I have received of the Lord that which also I delivered unto you, That the Lord Jesus the same night in which he was betrayed took bread:

24 And when he had given thanks, he brake it, and said, Take, eat: this is my body, which is broken for you: this do in remembrance of me.

25 After the same manner also he took the cup, when he had supped, saying, This cup is the new testament in my blood: this do ye, as oft as ye drink it, in remembrance of me.

to be broken on the cross, commanding his disciples to eat it as a memorial of his death and sufferings for their sakes. And accordingly he distributed of it to them all. In like manner he did with the cup after supper, declaring the wine contained in it to be a memorial of his blood shed for the ratification of the new covenant between God and man; and commanding them, upon every occasion of drinking it, to do it in remembrance of his blood so shed, and this covenant so ratified. And every one of them drank of it accordingly.

26 For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord's death till he come.

the death of our blessed Lord, and to keep him in our minds during his absence from us: in which memorials consequently every Christian, of what degree or condition soever, hath an equal right to partake, because every one is equally concerned in the mercy remembered and represented by them.

27 Wherefore whosoever shall eat this bread, and drink this cup of the Lord, unworthily, shall be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord.

and by unequal and uncharitable distinctions shall contradict the design of an ordinance which expresses Christ's love to all mankind in general, (high and low, rich and poor alike,) do treat his body and blood with contempt, like that of his murderers, who affronted and insulted him, as if he had been not only a common man, but one of the vilest of men.

28 But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread, and drink of that cup.

between rich and poor must be made, why are they not made at home? how is it that you thus affront the

those Christians who are on such occasions all upon the same level? This is a corruption which deserves very sharp reproof.

23, 24, 25. Consider with yourselves how different this proceeding is from the method taken by our Lord at the institution of this sacrament. He, as I learned from him, and acquainted you, the night he was betrayed took bread into his hands, and after blessing it, and God for it, broke that bread, and declared this to be a representation of his body

to be broken on the cross, commanding his disciples to eat it as a memorial of his death and sufferings for their sakes. And accordingly he distributed of it to them all. In like manner he did with the cup after supper, declaring the wine contained in it to be a memorial of his blood shed for the ratification of the new covenant between God and man; and commanding them, upon every occasion of drinking it, to do it in remembrance of his blood so shed, and this covenant so ratified. And every one of them drank of it accordingly.

26. Thus you see that the end of this sacrament is thereby to commemorate the

the death of our blessed Lord, and to keep him in our minds during his absence from us: in which memorials consequently every Christian, of what degree or condition soever, hath an equal right to partake, because every one is equally concerned in the mercy remembered and represented by them.

27. They therefore, who by thoir irregular practice shall profane a sacrament appointed to so holy a use;

and by unequal and uncharitable distinctions shall contradict the design of an ordinance which expresses Christ's love to all mankind in general, (high and low, rich and poor alike,) do treat his body and blood with contempt, like that of his murderers, who affronted and insulted him, as if he had been not only a common man, but one of the vilest of men.

28. Therefore before every approach to this sacrament, it is fit that a man see into

and be satisfied with the disposition of his own mind; that he come with due reverence to so holy an ordinance, and with charity to all those for whom the death commemorated in it was undergone. And then he will partake of this sacrament worthily.

29 *For he that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh damnation to himself, not discerning the Lord's body.* 29. But he that comes in a profane and disorderly manner, is so far from receiving benefit or a pledge of God's love in these consecrated elements, that they are to him an increase of guilt and a pledge of punishment from God, who must needs be highly provoked at the irreverence of those men who make no difference between the memorials of Christ's body distributed in the church, and any common meal.

30 *For this cause many are weak and sickly among you, and many sleep.* 30. Thus it is plain God hath expressed his anger against you of Corinth already, by punishing this profaneness and violation of the Lord's supper with diseases, of which some among you still lie languishing, and others are dead.

31 *For if we would judge ourselves, we should not be judged.* 31. For if we would take an account of ourselves, and be careful to celebrate this supper of the Lord with the reverence due to a feast of charity and the commemoration of a Saviour dying for the sins of the world, we should prevent these punishments from God.

32 *But when we are judged, we are chastened of the Lord, that we should not be condemned with the world.* 32. But when God thus chastises us with temporal afflictions, (*weakness, and sickness, &c.*) he intends that these should be warnings to us; that so repenting of the faults that have provoked him to send them upon us, we may escape the eternal punishments that await the wicked and profane and impenitent hereafter.

33 *Wherefore, my brethren, when ye come together to eat, tarry one for another.* 33. Therefore I exhort you, as brethren, that at all times of celebrating this holy feast you wait for the whole congregation, and order matters so that every one may partake of it.

34 *And if any man hunger, let him eat at home; that ye come not together unto condemnation. And the rest will I set in order when I come.* 34. And if any man's appetite be so keen, that upon this pretence he would hasten the feast before its proper time, let him satisfy these desires at his own house, and not draw upon the public congregation the scandal and punishment of such indecent practices as this I have been reprehending. And for other matters among you that stand in need of regulating, they shall be taken care of by me when I see you.

COMMENT.

I HAVE, in the paraphrase on this portion of Scripture, been larger than is usual, in hopes to deliver it, if possible, from those mistaken notions of unworthy receiving the blessed sacrament of the Lord's supper, which they who would excuse their not frequenting it pretend to

ground upon this passage to the Corinthians. With how little reason, this exposition makes it evident; but that I may make the case plain, even to the meanest capacity, I desire these two things may be farther considered :

1. That the damnation which St. Paul here speaks of is not eternal misery, or that which we find elsewhere termed *the damnation of hell*. The apostle sufficiently explains his own meaning, by adding, *"For this cause many are sick and weakly among you:"* which restrains the *damnation* spoken of before to bodily distempers and temporal punishments. And that no other but temporal could be intended follows unavoidably from the 32d verse, where this is called a *chastening of the Lord*, to prevent some worse condemnation. Now eternal damnation hath nothing of the nature of a chastisement in it, but it is entirely an act of vengeance. Nor is there any worse or future condemnation to follow, which that can possibly be inflicted as a warning or remedy against. Consequently, the damnation by the fear of which men commonly profess to be terrified from this sacrament is altogether different from that mentioned here, and hath nothing to do in the text of St. Paul.

2. As the punishment our people now scare themselves with is not, so neither is the unworthiness they profess to suspect themselves of, the same with that of these Corinthians. For the clearing this point let it be observed, that in the primitive church it was customary to bring to their religious assemblies, every one as he was able and disposed, provisions for a common entertainment. Out of these provisions a convenient quantity was set apart to be consecrated for the blessed sacrament. This sacrament was in some churches celebrated before, in others after that feast of love, (as this entertainment was used to be called,) but in all places they were both celebrated in company with each other. The design of these feasts was to express and maintain friendship and concord, and to shew that Christians esteemed themselves one family and one body; to be a comfort to the poor, whose necessities were thus relieved at the public expense, and to speak the charity and condescension of the rich, who thus declared their meaner brethren, in all Christian privileges, fellow members and equal with the greatest. These voluntary contributions were styled *oblations*, because every contributor was understood to devote what he brought to a religious use, wholly to divest himself of any property in it, and to make of the whole one common fund, to which God and the church only had from thenceforth a right. And therefore, as these entertainments were a feasting with God, and with the whole body of believers; so every one who had a right to this table (as all had, who for some notorious offence were not shut out from the communion of the Lord's supper) had right to share alike, though all did not contribute alike; nay even, though the circumstances of some were so strait that they could not contribute any part at all.

Now when this parity, an emblem of Christ's universal love to mankind, was broken in upon; when every one would take upon him to

eat at his own time, and in proportion to his own bringing; this was a separating what had been made common, a taking back that which had been solemnly given to God and his church; a defeating of all the ends and significations of these assemblies; a reproach to and robbery of the poor, by invading the comforts and the refreshments designed for them in a more peculiar manner; but especially it was an insufferable scandal and profanation, when such feasts as were intended to promote religion became the occasions of riot and excess. Abuses which grew so fast, and gave so great and just offence, as to render the total disuse of the *agapæ* or love-feasts expedient, and made the custom general of receiving the sacrament of the Lord's supper singly, and of changing the offering of bread and wine in kind to that of alms for the use of the poor, deposited in the hands of proper persons, most likely to know their several necessities, and to proportion this relief accordingly.

Is it not now as clear as the light, that in a church like ours, where the consecrated elements are furnished at the public expense; where no man brings or takes his own supper, but all is delivered by the minister without any respect of persons; where distribution is made equally, decently, devoutly, and as nigh to the primitive institution as can well be imagined; is it not clear, I say, that the unworthiness charged upon the Corinthians neither is nor possibly can be ours? And, if so, it must follow that these texts of St. Paul are perverted to a very wrong use, when made the pretence of keeping from the holy table men whose present circumstances have no manner of concern in or relation to them.

I readily allow that men may be under the danger of receiving unworthily upon several other accounts as well as this. Every notorious and wilful offence against and failure in the particulars which my last discourse laid down, as fit preparations for this blessed ordinance, does without question render them unworthy. But how does St. Paul proceed on this occasion? By those expressions, *Do this, as oft as ye shall drink it, in remembrance of me; and, as oft as ye eat this bread and drink this cup, ye do shew forth the Lord's death till he come*; he abundantly intimates that this is a duty which ought frequently to be performed. So the first Christians plainly understood it, who seem to have made this as constant a part of their public worship as any other. And after denouncing the judgments of God against unworthy communicants, he does not, for prevention of these, exhort them to consult their own safety by abstaining altogether, but by *examining and judging themselves*; and so *eating of that bread and drinking of that cup*. Thus did the apostle, thus does our church argue: *If any man say, I am a grievous sinner, and therefore am afraid to come: wherefore then do ye not repent and amend? When God calleth you, are ye not ashamed to say ye will not come? When ye should return to God, will ye excuse yourselves, and say ye are not ready? Consider earnestly with yourselves how little such feigned excuses will avail before God*. In short, he that comes not,

b Ver. 25, 26.

c Ver. 28.

d Second Exhortation.

and he that comes unworthily, are both of them in a dangerous and damnable state. The former, because he will not use his best remedy; the latter, because he profanes and abuses his best remedy. And there is but one way for both to be safe, which is by coming as often and as well prepared as they can; and then God will not fail to forgive and kindly to accept them.

Did men but consider (what is most certainly true) that every act of religion, public or private, requires the very same disposition of mind with this sacrament; that no man is fit (for instance) to say the Lord's prayer who is not fit to eat and drink at his table; that reading and hearing and praying unworthily (that is, without due reverence, and in the love and indulgence of any wilful sin) is damnable, as well as unworthy communicating; they would soon see cause to alter their measures with relation to this matter. They would find that the excuses usually alleged for the neglect of this would, if pursued through their just consequences, hold every whit as strongly for casting off every branch of solemn worship enjoined by the Christian religion. I speak not this with the least intent to lower the respect and care due to this holy ordinance; God forbid! but to heighten it for others, such as prayer, public and private, hearing God's word, and the like; which are too commonly done as things of course. And yet there is not one of all these, the due performance whereof does not require the same sorrow for our past sins, the same steadfast purposes of amendment, the same faith in Christ, the same charity to our fellow Christians and to all men, as the communicating at the blessed table. And no man is accepted by God in any of these who is not fit to come to the other. To say all in a word; no man who leads a good life can ever be unprepared for the Lord's supper; and no man who leads a bad one can come prepared to that or to any Christian ordinance whatsoever.

And this, I hope, may serve to shew the vanity of another sort of unpreparedness commonly alleged, the want, I mean, of leisure to retire so many hours, or to say so many prayers, before each communion. These are, no question, very proper exercises, when men have opportunities for them; and no man can take too much pains with himself, to afflict his soul with remorse, or to raise his affections and devotion on such occasions. But to think that by these meditations and prayers we are, and that without them we cannot be, prepared, is rank superstition, and an error that draws a world of ill consequences after it. For even those prayers, if we hold fast any darling lust, are an abomination, an hypocrisy that mocks God, and deludes one's own soul. And I wish all people could be made duly sensible, that although a *week's preparation*, when such extraordinary addresses are added to a *conscience void of offence toward God and toward man*, may be exceeding well; yet nothing can be depended upon but the communicating frequently and reverently, and living as if we were every day to communicate between one opportunity and another. To cease to do evil, and learn to do well; to love God and keep his commandments; to follow the works of our calling with industry; and to

provide for our families with honesty; to trust in God's good providence, and be content with our condition; to preserve unity in the church, peace and order in the state; to study to be quiet, to do our own business, and the duty of the capacity and the relations we stand in; to abhor uncleanness and evil-speaking and all uncharitableness; this is true preparation: and he that thus communicates, though at a minute's warning, will never be rejected of God, or deserve to be condemned by men. And therefore men would do well to consider this, and how they can answer either living out of such a state, or neglecting the sacrament when they are in it.

THE GOSPEL. St. Luke xxiii.

1 *And the whole multitude of them arose, and led him unto Pilate.*

2 *And they began to accuse him, saying, We found this fellow perverting the nation, and forbidding to give tribute to Cæsar, saying that he himself is Christ a King.*

3 *And Pilate asked him, saying, Art thou the King of the Jews? And he answered him and said, Thou sayest it.*

4 *Then said Pilate to the chief priests and to the people, I find no fault in this man.*

5 *And they were the more fierce, saying, He stirreth up the people, teaching throughout all Jewry, beginning from Galilee to this place.*

6 *When Pilate heard of Galilee, he asked whether the man were a Galilean.*

7 *And as soon as he knew that he belonged unto Herod's jurisdiction, he sent him to Herod, who himself also was at Jerusalem at that time.*

8 *And when Herod saw Jesus, he was exceeding glad: for he was desirous to see him of a long season, because he had heard many things of him; and he hoped to have seen some miracle done by him.*

9 *Then he questioned with him in many words; but he answered him nothing.*

10 *And the chief priests and scribes stood and vehemently accused him.*

11 *And Herod with his men of war set him at nought, and mocked him, and arrayed him in a gorgeous robe, and sent him again to Pilate.*

12 *And the same day Pilate and Herod were made friends together: for before they were at enmity between themselves.*

13 *And Pilate, when he had called together the chief priests and the rulers and the people,*

14 *Said unto them, Ye have brought this man unto me, as one that perverteth the people: and, behold, I, having examined him before you, have found no fault in this man touching those things whereof ye accuse him:*

15 *No, nor yet Herod: for I sent you to him; and, lo, nothing worthy of death is done unto him.*

16 *I will therefore chastise him, and release him.*

17 *(For of necessity he must release one unto them at the feast.)*

18 *And they cried out all at once, saying, Away with this man, and release unto us Barabbas:*

19 (*Who for a certain sedition made in the city, and for murder, was cast into prison.*)

20 *Pilate therefore, willing to release Jesus, spake again to them.*

21 *But they cried, saying, Crucify him, crucify him.*

22 *And he said unto them the third time, Why, what evil hath he done? I have found no cause of death in him: I will therefore chastise him, and let him go.*

23 *And they were instant with loud voices, requiring that he might be crucified. And the voices of them and of the chief priests prevailed.*

24 *And Pilate gave sentence that it should be as they required.*

25 *And he released unto them him that for sedition and murder was cast into prison, whom they had desired; but he delivered Jesus to their will.*

26 *And as they led him away, they laid hold upon one Simon, a Cyrenian, coming out of the country, and on him they laid the cross, that he might bear it after Jesus.*

27 *And there followed him a great company of people, and of women, which also bewailed and lamented him.*

28 *But Jesus turning unto them said, Daughters of Jerusalem, weep not for me, but weep for yourselves, and for your children.*

29 *For, behold, the days are coming, in the which they shall say, Blessed are the barren, and the wombs that never bare, and the paps which never gave suck.*

30 *Then shall they begin to say to the mountains, Fall on us; and to the hills, Cover us.*

31 *For if they do these things in a green tree, what shall be done in the dry?*

32 *And there were also two other, malefactors, led with him to be put to death.*

33 *And when they were come to the place, which is called Calvary, there they crucified him, and the malefactors, one on the right hand, and the other on the left.*

34 *Then said Jesus, Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do. And they parted his raiment, and cast lots.*

35 *And the people stood beholding. And the rulers also with them derided him, saying, He saved others; let him save himself, if he be Christ, the chosen of God.*

36 *And the soldiers also mocked him, coming to him, and offering him vinegar,*

37 *And saying, If thou be the king of the Jews, save thyself.*

38 *And a superscription also was written over him in letters of Greek, and Latin, and Hebrew, THIS IS THE KING OF THE JEWS.*

39 *And one of the malefactors which were hanged railed on him, saying, If thou be Christ, save thyself and us.*

40 *But the other answering rebuked him, saying, Dost not thou fear God, seeing thou art in the same condemnation?*

41 *And we indeed justly; for we receive the due reward of our deeds: but this man hath done nothing amiss.*

42 *And he said unto Jesus, Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom.*

43 *And Jesus said unto him, Verily I say unto thee, To day shalt thou be with me in paradise.*

44 *And it was about the sixth hour, and there was a darkness over all the earth until the ninth hour.*

45 *And the sun was darkened, and the veil of the temple was rent in the midst.*

46 *And when Jesus had cried with a loud voice, he said, Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit: and having said thus, he gave up the ghost.*

47 *Now when the centurion saw what was done, he glorified God, saying, Certainly this was a righteous man.*

48 *And all the people that came together to that sight, beholding the things which were done, smote their breasts, and returned.*

49 *And all his acquaintance, and the women that followed him from Galilee, stood afar off, beholding these things.*

COMMENT.

THERE are three things in this day's Gospel which I choose at present to treat of, as more especially calling for our serious consideration.

I. The first is our Lord's great charity in praying for his enemies, ver. 34. *Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do.*

II. The second is the case of the penitent thief, from ver. 39 to ver. 43 inclusively.

III. The last, our Lord's commending his soul to his Father, ver. 46. Of these briefly in their order.

I. I begin with our Lord's praying for his enemies, ver. 34, in which he hath set us an example of the most perfect charity, as will appear if we observe,

First, that the praying God to forgive them implies that he himself forgave them. For the very design of prayer is to beg that God would do that which the person praying is heartily disposed to do, but either cannot compass it at all, or not without God's special assistance. And therefore to ask of him that which, if in our own power, we would not grant, is turning our devotion into mockery, and a piece of the vilest and most impious dissimulation. It is true that Christ, as God, could bestow the blessing he here intercedes for; but I have said heretofore, that in all those actions which speak submission, (and such to be sure is prayer,) he is to be considered as a mere man; and the powers of the Divine nature, though actually inseparable from his human, yet are at such times to be looked upon as under a voluntary suspension. And therefore neither does the humble manner of this intercession prove any thing against his divinity; nor the being God as well as man call into question the sincerity of his request; though able, in one of these capacities, to give that which, in the other, he vouchsafed to ask.

Meanwhile, the point I am upon is sufficiently confirmed by our Lord's own command in another place. Where, as evidences of *loving our enemies, after doing good to them that hate us, and blessing them that curse us*, is added, *Pray for them that despitefully use you and persecute you*. This being the highest, as well as the most beneficial instance of charity. Such as no perverseness of our enemies can obstruct; but such, withal, as cannot come in regularly till we have brought ourselves to those that went before. Because they may be counterfeit and designing where we transact with men only; but in this God is a party, and prayer appeals to him for the earnestness of our wishes and the integrity of our hearts.

2. Secondly, the greatness of our Saviour's charity is most conspicuous from the time of putting up this prayer. It was not only for men who had persecuted him to the death, prefaced that death with all the calumnies and reproaches, the utmost insolence and indignities, that unrelenting malice could invent or execute; but it was at the very instant when he was expiring under unconceivable torture and anguish, and in the most infamous manner bleeding out an innocent soul. It was for merciless wretches, hardened murderers, who were even then insulting over his last agonies, and triumphing in their own wicked barbarity. So far above the power of shame and pain and wrong, and still obstinate and exasperating spite, was the firmness and meekness of his holy mind. And what a pattern have we here to set before our eyes! the generality of whom are so soon provoked, so violently transported, so implacably incensed, at injuries or affronts of no mighty consequence; so hard to forgive, even when we feel no smart, even when the heat is over, and the damage imaginary only. Oh, how far short is this of his perfection! how unlike to his true greatness of soul, who is said, in his patience and charity more especially, to have *left us an example, that we should follow his steps!*

3. A third instance of this charity consists in the apology made here in behalf of his murderers, *Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do*. They might indeed and ought to have known, but the Scriptures bear them witness that if they had *known him, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory*^s. This ignorance is all the extenuation the horror of their crime was capable of. And some it always is, though in proportion less as the means of knowledge are greater. Thus our Lord does not only wish their pardon, but plead and turn advocate for the vilest of miscreants. A noble warning to all his disciples, that they too, when ill treated, should make all possible allowances, and put the most favourable construction upon the wrongs they suffer; and let ignorance and infirmities, passions and surprises, be heard in mitigation of their resentments, and by these be inclined to give their own, and to beg of God his pardon for the worst of injuries and enemies.

II. The case of the penitent thief was the second thing I promised to speak to. And here two things are fit to be considered. (1.) The comforts it administers when rightly understood. And (2.) the false

security too commonly grounded upon it, and consequently, the great danger of its being misunderstood.

1. As to the first, it is remarkable that the other evangelists say, *the thieves* reviled our Lord upon the cross. Which though it be an usual and very allowable figure of speech, the putting a plural number for a singular, yet St. Chrysostom and St. Jerome have chosen to reconcile those with St. Luke's account here, by understanding both to have been guilty of it, but this to have retracted, and have been converted, as we see. Admitting their interpretation of the place, the operations of grace upon his mind were still more wonderfully sudden and strong. But be that as it will, the Scripture furnishes no instance like it of so happy a change at a man's last moments. The *labourers of the eleventh hour* are indeed a mighty encouragement to all people who have had the misery of living long in ignorance and sin. Yet those labourers had one hour left, in which we are at liberty to suppose they signalized themselves, and wrought with extraordinary diligence. But here we have a poor wretch almost expiring, certain death upon him, dying under public punishment for a very heinous crime; and thus, at the end of a life led probably after the rate that theirs generally are whose wickedness at length brings them to an untimely and scandalous end, this creature is softened at once, received into favour, and promised a translation from the gibbet into paradise that very day.

This certainly is a monument of mercy, a standing comfort to all who truly repent, though at their last hour; an anchor of hope to sorrowful sinners, and a plain argument that sincere amendment never comes too late. For even they who have long lain in the *snarcs of the devil*, and through the course of a whole life *been taken captive by him at his will*, shall, like this reclaimed thief, be rescued, accepted, rewarded; provided they, like him, return to God, and improve their never so small remainder of time to the best advantage.

But the fatal delusion in this case is, that few people consider what it is to be converted *like him*. They look at the event, but forget the circumstances that led to it. And hence grow those false confidences, and the great danger of misunderstanding and misapplying the account of this matter, which I am endeavouring now to prevent by my second particular upon this subject.

For when this action comes to be thoroughly weighed, some things will be found in it very extraordinary, some that seldom have, some that can never have a parallel. This man, it is probable, had never seen or heard of Christ before; or if he had, it is yet more strange that he, who had stood out till then, should come in to the acknowledgment of him now; now, when his enemies were insulting over him, when his own disciples and the companions of his preaching and miracles had forsaken him, when they who once *trusted it had been he who should have redeemed Israel* despaired of him, when the companion of his wickedness was at the same time reproaching and blaspheming him; that he, I say, should, in this lowest ebb of misery and shame

and scorn that ever the Son of God did or could stoop to, throw himself upon his protection, acknowledge his kingdom, believe him Lord of a future and better state, and the disposer of rewards and happiness after death; and all this upon so surprising a conviction, and in answer to the very first calls of grace; this argues so ingenuous a temper, so noble and so bold a faith, as never was outdone, as never can in all respects be equalled, except the same Jesus were again to be crucified: because no man's conversion ever had, ever can have upon other terms, the same disadvantages and discouragements which this man's laboured under, and so generously overcame.

Might not then St. Chrysostom, as with great force he does, rebuke the impudence of those late penitents who presume to take sanctuary in this example? who live under the ministry of the gospel, and enjoy both the outward calls of God's word and the inward solicitations of his Spirit, but turn the deaf ear continually to both? who profess to believe a risen and a glorified Redeemer, to expect him as their Judge, and call him Lord and King, and have listed themselves in his service by baptism; but pay him no degree of that respect, which this stranger did, when he had rendered himself of no reputation, and appeared in the guise of the vilest malefactor? This certainly shews such a difference as must, if reflected on, convince all wilful delayers of repentance that they have no precedent to produce for their confidence, indeed, that their state is as unlike to his, as that of a conversion astonishingly speedy and gallant is to an obstinate backwardness and delay, and that the only part of the comparison that holds is that of death being at the door.

That God should communicate the assistance of his grace very liberally to one so disposed to close with the first motions of it as this thief, agrees with those exalted notions of his goodness which both reason and revelation hath given us. But what assurance can we have from either of his readiness to assist and bring over those who have received it in vain? Why should they suppose that a Spirit so often driven away will be at their call whenever they please; and, by a more than common influence, work in them a change, just when they come to die, which they would never be prevailed upon to concur with or consent to in the whole course of their lives? No, no. If these men are desirous to find a parallel, they have it here at hand. The other thief, who went out of the world railing and reviling, is much more likely to be the true emblem of their sad condition. For he is far from being the only instance of a wicked creature given up by God at his last hour; but the penitent thief is the only one we are sure of reclaimed at his last hour. And this too such a one as cannot be drawn into consequence by any Christian, by reason of those circumstances, in which it is not so much as possible for this case to agree with that of any who shall presume to defer his repentance, though but till the next hour.

Let us therefore deal fairly with ourselves, and not read this story by halves. Let us in it contemplate the justice of a provoked, as well as the mercy of a forgiving God. *If to-day, while it is called to-day, we*

do our part, we have a title to the consolations of this case; but if we put off from day to day, and continue to harden our hearts, it contains not one syllable of comfort for us, and all we build upon it is without a foundation. The extent of our lives we cannot, but the difficulties of a death-bed repentance we may certainly know. And if once matters come to this pass, we cannot be sure of the power, nay, we cannot be sure of so much as the will, to repent. But supposing this not to be denied us, we cannot have the same assurance of being then accepted which this thief had. For many things at such a time concur to deceive us: and even those good purposes then raised in our minds God only can foresee whether they would be steadfast. We find by experience many, who have resolved well, if God grant an unexpected recovery, relapse into their old impieties; and do not only deceive others, but themselves too. The only course then to be safe and easy is to repent so early, that the fruits may put the sincerity of our change past any doubt: for we can never have too mean a thought of doing this upon beds of languishing, and at the approach of death. And the most that ought to be said in favour of such a delay is not to pronounce it altogether desperate. But this is a danger which, I hope, the due observance of this holy season we are now in hath delivered us from. And if so, then may we with great equanimity imitate our blessed Lord in that act, which I proposed to treat of in the

III. Third and last place, described in these words, ver. 46, *Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit.* The observations which this furnishes matter for are principally these that follow:

1. This proves the reality of Christ's human nature, with regard to the soul no less than the body. For the spirit here commended to God could not be the Divine Spirit, which some ancient heretics imagined Christ's body to have been actuated by; but it must be the same intelligent part of him, as man, which is in every one of us the principle of life and sense and motion; and which by death is dislodged from a fleshly mass, no longer in condition to receive and be influenced by it.

2. The manner of our Lord's giving up this spirit hath generally been thought to carry in it an air of authority; and to intimate, that, as the delivering it was an act of free choice, so the resuming of it was likewise fully in his own power; and therefore the form made use of on this occasion is such as properly denotes the leaving goods of value to be kept by a trusty friend till called for again. It may be said indeed, that other good men, who confessedly have not the same power, are found to have committed their souls to God in like manner. They have indeed done so, but with this difference; that in Christ this was a declaration of his having purchased immortality for human nature, and a sort of claim for raising it from the dead; in others, it is an expression of their faith that their souls and bodies shall again be united, by virtue of that resurrection which their Saviour's rising hath ensured to them.

3. From hence it follows, that the human soul is a substance distinct from the body, that it lives after it, in a state separate from it, and such a state as is susceptible of happiness or misery. For why is the spirit here the object of our Lord's care, and deposited in God's hands; but because these are set to signify a place of safety from danger, where souls shall not only survive, but live too, in a manner far distant from that in which they lived here; where no temptation shall be able to assault, no sin to pollute, no affliction to discompose them? This we find to have been the sense even of the Jewish Church before our Saviour's time: *h The souls of the righteous are in the hand of God, and there shall no torment touch them. In the sight of the unwise they seemed to die: and their departure is taken for misery, and their going from us to be utter destruction: but they are in peace:*

4. Lastly, from hence there seems also to be sufficient foundation for concluding, that the souls of good men enter upon a state of bliss immediately after their departure out of the body. Especially if, together with these words to his Father, we take Christ's promise made just before to the penitent thief, that *he should that day be with him in paradise.*

These are particulars that cannot now conveniently receive an enlargement worthy of them: and are therefore recommended to the improvement of the reader: who will not find it difficult from hence to draw such inferences as may turn to great account; by supporting him under the trials of the present life, by arming him against the immoderate fears of death; and by quickening him in such virtues and graces as are necessary to justify his hopes of exchanging this for an infinitely better state, when God shall see him ripe for it.

GOOD FRIDAY.

THE COLLECTS.

ALMIGHTY God, we beseech thee graciously to behold this thy ^afamily, for which our Lord Jesus Christ was contented to be betrayed, and given up into the hands of wicked men, and to suffer death upon the cross, who now liveth and reigneth with thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

ALMIGHTY and everlasting God, by whose Spirit the whole body of the Church is governed and sanctified^b; Receive our

^a Wisd. iii. 1, 2, 3. ^b Eph. iii. 14, 15; Matt. xxvi. xxvii; Acts ii. 23; Phil. ii. 8-11.

^c 1 Cor. xii. 12, 13; Eph. iv. 4; 1 Pet. i. 2; Rom. xii. 4-8; 1 Cor. xii. 12, 20; Eph. iv. 1.

supplications and prayers, which we offer before thee for all estates of men in thy holy Church, that every member of the same, in his vocation and ministry, may truly and godly serve thee; through our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

O merciful God, who hast made all men, and hatest nothing that thou hast made, nor wouldest the death of a sinner, but rather that he should be converted and live^c; Have mercy upon all Jews, Turks, Infidels, and Hereticks, and take from them all ignorance, hardness of heart, and contempt of thy Word; and so fetch them home, blessed Lord, to thy flock, that they may be saved among the remnant of the true Israelites, and be made one fold under one shepherd, Jesus Christ our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with thee and the Holy Spirit, one God, world without end. Amen.

THE EPISTLE. Heb. x. 1.

1 The law having a shadow of good things to come, and not the very image of the things, can never with those sacrifices which they offered year by year continually make the comers thereunto perfect.

2 For then would they not have ceased to be offered? because that the worshippers once purged should have had no more conscience of sins.

3 But in those sacrifices there is a remembrance again made of sins every year.

4 For it is not possible that the blood of bulls and of goats should take away sins.

5 Wherefore when he cometh into the world, he saith, Sacrifice and offering thou wouldest not, but a body hast thou prepared me:

6 In burnt offerings and sacrifices for sin thou hast had no pleasure.

7 Then said I, Lo, I come (in the volume of the book it is written of me) to do thy will, O God.

8 Above, when he said, Sacrifice and offering and burnt offerings and offering for sin thou wouldest not, neither hadst pleasure therein, which are offered by the law;

9 Then said he, Lo, I come to do thy will, O God. He taketh away the first, that he may establish the second.

10 By the which will we are sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.

11 And every priest standeth daily ministering and offering oftentimes the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins:

12 But this man, after he had offered one sacrifice for sins, for ever sat down on the right hand of God;

- 13 *From henceforth expecting till his enemies be made his footstool.*
 14 *For by one offering he hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified.*
 15 *Whereof the Holy Ghost also is a witness to us : for after that he had said before,*
 16 *This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days, saith the Lord, I will put my laws into their hearts, and in their minds will I write them ;*
 17 *And their sins and iniquities will I remember no more.*
 18 *Now where remission of these is, there is no more offering for sin.*
 19 *Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus,*
 20 *By a new and living way, which he hath consecrated for us, through the veil, that is to say, his flesh ;*
 21 *And having an high priest over the house of God ;*
 22 *Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water.*
 23 *Let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering ; (for he is faithful that promised ;)*
 24 *And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works :*
 25 *Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is ; but exhorting one another : and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching.*

COMMENT.

THE Epistle for this day, being a continuation of an argument carried on in the chapter foregoing, hath already fallen in great measure within the compass of two former discourses upon that subject^d. For this reason it is that I conceive a paraphrase of the words not very necessary, and that all I design to say at present shall be somewhat very briefly on these two points:

I. First, that the death of Christ was a true and proper sacrifice for sin ; and

II. Secondly, that this sacrifice was offered by him upon the cross.

I. First, I say, the death of Christ was a true and proper sacrifice for sin. The best light we can have concerning matters of this nature is derived from the ordinances and customs of the Jews and their law. Now thence it is certain that such ceremonies were used as plainly intimated a translation of punishment and guilt from the person offering to the thing offered ; and an acceptance of one life taken away, as substituted in the place of another, which by the law was looked upon as forfeited.

To this purpose the owner of the beast devoted to the altar, by bringing and laying his hands upon the head of it, did thus declare his property first, and then the free transferring of that property to

^d Epistle for fifth Sunday in Lent ; Epistle for Wednesday before Easter.

God, by delivering it to death for the ends and uses specified in the law. And with allusion to this rite it is that we read of Christ *laying down his life, giving himself for us*, offering *this own body a sacrifice for sin*; and many other passages of like importance.

It is also certain, that, in sin-offerings, the party concerned did confess his crime over the sacrifice; thus, as is expressed in the law of the scape-goat, *putting his transgressions upon the head of the beast*. That such beast was afterwards looked on as unclean; that it conveyed a legal impurity to those who touched it; as being, in the eye of the law, charged with their sins in whose behalf it was offered. This was the reason why such sacrifices were not to be eaten, as the rest were, by the offerers, but by the priests only¹. Who, in this regard, were mediators between God and his people, and by their consumption of it testified God's acceptance, and the abolition of the sin. This again is the cause why the bodies of the beasts, offered in the most solemn occasions of this kind, were carried out and burned without the camp². All which are ceremonies necessary to be attended to, for a right understanding of those very significant passages, which speak of God's *laying on Christ the iniquities of us all*, of his *bearing our sins in his own body*, of his being *made sin and a curse for us*, of his *suffering without the gate of the city*, in conformity to the bodies burnt without the camp, and of our having a *sin-offering, of which the Jews have no right to eat*.

Once more, it is assigned as a reason for prohibiting the use of blood in common food, that this was *given upon the altar to make an atonement for their souls*; and hence it is that we so often hear of *redemption through Christ's blood*, of *peace made by the blood of his cross*, that himself mentions the *new testament in his blood*, and the like.

These and other places of the same nature, every considering man must acknowledge it reasonable to interpret in agreement with those in the Old Testament to which they so manifestly allude. And if so, it will follow, that either the Jews themselves had no such thing, or else that the death of Christ was a true and proper sacrifice. More truly such indeed than any of theirs. As it actually conveyed the benefits which those could not; as its virtue was inherent, theirs only relative; and as it is the substance, of which theirs were shadows and representations. For that those were no better hath been largely proved before; that this was not only a true and proper, but a sufficient sacrifice and satisfaction, a very few words will suffice to shew, after what I have had occasion to urge in this point already.

How acceptable to God this sacrifice was, it is the design of all those texts to inform us which declare his perfect innocence; either in plain terms, such as *doing and knowing no sin*; suffering, *the just for the unjust*; not *needing, as other priests, to offer first for himself, and then for the people*: or, with reference to the rules of choosing out

* 1 John iii. 16. f Tit. ii. 14. g Heb. x. 9, 10. h Levit. xvi. 21. i Levit. x. 17.
 k Levit. xvi. 27. l Isaiah liii. 6. m 1 Pet. ii. 24; 2 Cor. v. 21; Gal. iii. 13.
 n Heb. xiii. 11, 12. o Levit. xvii. 10, 11, 12. p Rom. iii. 25. q Coloss. i. 20;
 r Luke xxi. 20; s 1 Pet. ii. 21; 2 Cor. v. 21. t 1 Pet. iii. 18. u Heb. vii. 27.

the best for the service of the altar, which call him *the Lamb of God without blemish and without spot*, the *Lamb that takes away the sin*, that *was slain from the foundation of the world*; and that *offered himself to God without spot through the eternal Spirit*.

The same truth is yet more clearly and fully contained in those many Scriptures which ascribe to him a complete deliverance from all the inconveniences and miseries which sin is anywhere charged with bringing upon mankind. Is the sinner in debt to the law, and, like bankrupts of old, or criminals under condemnation, liable to be given up to the tormenters? Christ, we are told, *hath cancelled the handwriting that was against us, nailing it to his cross*. He hath *given his life a ransom for many*; he hath *redeemed us from the curse of the law*; he hath *bought us with a price*, so that *in him we have redemption through his blood, even the remission of sins*.

Have sinners departed from God, alienated his affection, and put themselves in a state not only of distance from, but even of enmity against him? The aliens and strangers who *were once afar off* are said to be *made nigh by the blood of Christ*; and he to have *reconciled us to his Father by the body of his flesh through death*. For which reason we find him emphatically styled *our peace*, because he hath *slain this enmity by his cross*.

Does sin leave a stain and pollution upon the souls of men, such as renders them odious and loathsome in the sight of a God *of purer eyes than to behold iniquity*? *His blood* is said to *wash us*, *to cleanse us from all sin*, *to purge our consciences from dead works*; we are said to be (like the things purified from legal uncleanness heretofore) *sprinkled and sanctified by this blood of the covenant*, and by that *will of God* which removed the many imperfect Levitical, that he might *establish this one perfect evangelical purification, even the offering of the body of Jesus Christ*, as the scripture now before us expressly asserts.

Once more; as the dire effects of sin are by no images more lively represented than by those of wounds and putrifying sores, of sickness and death; so neither are the benefits of our Lord's passion at any time more sensibly expressed than by his *stripes healing us*, by his *quickening them that are dead in trespasses and sins*, and our *living in and by him who died for us*. And to shew that the virtue of this spiritual restorative knows no bounds, he is said to *justify men from all things from which they could not be justified by any former dispensation*, and to *save even the chief of sinners*.

Thus much, I conceive, may very well suffice for proving the death of Christ, not only a true, but a sufficient sacrifice and satisfaction for sin. It only remains now that I shew this sacrifice and satisfaction to have consisted strictly in that which makes the principal subject of our devotions this day, his dying upon the cross for us.

Now, for a right understanding of this matter, we must again be

x 1 Pet. i. 19. y John i. 29. z Rev. xiii. 8. a Heb. ix. 14. b Coloss. ii. 14.
 c Matt. xx. 28. d Gal. iii. 13. e 1 Cor. vi. 20. f Rom. iii. 24, 25. g Eph. ii. 13,
 15, 16. h Habak. i. 13. i Rev. i. 5. k 1 John i. 7. l Heb. ix. 14. m Heb. x. 9, 10.
 n 1 Pet. ii. 24. o Eph. ii. 1. p 1 Thess. v. 10. q Acts xiii. 39. r 1 Tim. i. 15.

beholding to the guidance of those rites and offices so often referred to in this Epistle; which were peculiar to the Jews' yearly solemnity on the great day of atonement. But we must, in the contemplation of those rites, be sure to take this caution along with us; that our Lord is to be considered in a double capacity, as the sacrifice offered, and as the priest offering it. And therefore, care must be had to distinguish between these two relations, between the acts and effects proper to him in the one and in the other of these qualities, which were united in one and the same person at the time of this oblation, but remained perfectly distinct, and had different subjects in every other oblation whatsoever.

Now, at that day of expiation only, the sin-offerings were commanded to be slain by the high priest's own hand. And this was as significant an emblem as the condition of the thing would bear of our great High Priest and sin-offering both *laying down his own life* and *voluntarily offering up himself for us*. Of the blood of those sacrifices the Levitical high priest was to bring part into the holy place, which, containing the symbols of God's more special presence and favour, was, as you have seen before, a figure of heaven. Christ therefore, by ascending into heaven with his crucified body, performed an act, exactly correspondent to that of the high priest when carrying the blood of the sin-offering into the holy place. And therefore he is observed to have performed this part of his sacerdotal office, with the difference of one or two very material circumstances to our advantage; that, whereas that figurative sanctuary was entered with the *blood of others* (of calves and goats) *yearly*, he entered into the true, the heavenly sanctuary *once* only, and then *with his own blood*.

The question now arising from hence is, whether the atonement under the law were actually made by the blood of the sacrifice when slain in the outward tabernacle, or when brought and sprinkled within the veil: and, in proportion, whether the sins of men under the gospel be expiated by the death of Christ's body on the cross, or by exhibiting that crucified body before his Father in heaven.

For resolving this doubt, let it be considered in what capacity the high priest entered the holy place; why he entered into it but once a year; and why then not without blood.

First then, it is manifest, that on the day of atonement the high priest went twice into the holy place; once, with the blood of the bullock, which was slain as a sin-offering for himself and for his house^c. And by bringing in this blood was signified the remission of his own sins, and of theirs who assisted in the service of the altar; and herein he was the representative of the priestly order, and qualified to proceed in offering for others. Thus purged, he was the figure of that great High Priest, whose perfect innocence exempted him from a double entrance, as not needing to offer for himself, in order to render him capable of being accepted for others^d. A second time he

^c Levit. xvi. 12, 13, 14.

^d Ver. 15.

entered with the blood of the goat, which was slain as a sin-offering for the people. And thus he sustained a more public character; representing the whole congregation, who virtually, and in the construction of the law, entered together with him. And in this regard he resembled our Jesus, *by whose blood* (as we have heard this morning) *we have boldness to enter into the holiest, by a new and living way which he hath consecrated for us through the veil, that is to say, his flesh.*

Secondly, the high priest entering but once (that is, one day only) in the year, was never intended to prove that no sacrifices for sin offered on any other day, when he did not enter, were not effectual for remission. For the contrary is manifest from the law itself. But the difference is, that those other sacrifices were occasional and personal; and thus far they availed, that the parties offering them were purified from those particular transgressions then confessed, and restored to all the privileges of communion with God in his worship. But the effect of the sacrifices offered on the day of atonement, and of those only, was general, and extended to the benefit of the whole body of the people. These therefore were the most express image of a sacrifice to be offered for the sins of all mankind. And a year being a perfect revolution of time, in which all nature seems to have finished its course; the allowing this solemn atonement to be yearly and no more, was the best intimation that economy was capable of giving that this great sacrifice should be offered but once, and that it should suffice to *perfect for ever* the persons sanctified by it.

Thirdly, the high priest, even at that solemn day, was not allowed to enter into the holy place without blood. By being denied familiar and constant access to the presence of God, was intimated that state of guilt which rendereth men unworthy to approach him. By being allowed it after the slaying of the sin-offering, is signified the removal of that guilt and unworthiness by God's acceptance of the sacrifice. So that this access supposes an expiation: and the bringing in of the blood is not the making such expiation, but the evidence of one already made. This is the type: and the antitype exactly answers it. Human nature, while polluted by sin, was incapable of entering heaven; our Lord, by suffering in this nature, hath procured to it immortality, and admittance thither. He entered there as our common representative; and by that entrance testifies the expiation finished: for so it must be, or ever our nature could gain access thither. The ascent then to and residence of our nature in heaven, is an argument that God is fully reconciled. The crucified body of our Lord dwelling for ever with God is a continual exhibiting of the merits and efficacy of his sacrifice; but the act of entering is not properly a sacrificial act in Christ, or of an expiatory nature, farther than it declares the sacrifice, and the power of it. It is indeed an act of triumph after, and reward for, having offered himself up in this quality. The death of our Lord on the cross answers to the death of the sin-offering at the altar. The remission is obtained by means of, and consequently

to be dated from the time of shedding the blood. Hence is our Saviour said to *rise again for our justification*. And how could that be said of him, if we were not justified till some time after he rose, and if no pardon were obtained till his ascent into heaven? Hence the *blood of the cross* is said to have *made our peace*; and that in the cross (or his body upon it, as some understand that passage) he defeated and *triumphed over* the enemies of our souls. Hence again we read, that *after he had by himself purged our sins, he sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high*. And, in the very scripture I am upon, that *after he had offered one sacrifice for sins for ever, he sat down on the right hand of God*. And lastly, hence we may reasonably presume he expired upon the cross with those significant words in his mouth, *It is finished*: of which more in the following service for this day.

In the meanwhile I only add, that what hath been here advanced commits no violence at all upon those texts where Christ's eternal priesthood is asserted. For sacrificing, though a part, was never the whole of the priestly character. Blessing and intercession are as essential branches of it as the other. And these our Lord continues to discharge with such fulness of power, as not to be an humble suppliant for, but the *author and giver of salvation*; the bestower, and not only the asker of blessings, to them for whom he vouchsafes to intercede: and an eternal priest he thus far is with regard to the sacrificing part too, as he hath, by that one offering for sin, put an utter end to, and rendered all repetition of such not only needless, but unsafe and sinful.

Upon the whole matter it is very obvious what mighty consolations we may, we ought to take, even in the sad solemnity of this day. What tears of joy are fit to be mingled with those of grief and penitence. The latter we should be stupid and inhuman not to pay to the dismal agonies of our dearest Master; the former we should be unthankful, and cruel to ourselves, not to give the happy effects of the misery he so graciously condescended to undergo for us. But to make both effectual, let us, inflamed with zeal and gratitude and love unfeigned, endeavour for our own particular, and most devoutly beg for the rest, (as the best of churches teaches us,) that the innumerable benefits of this precious bloodshedding may have their full extent and free course: that *we, and the whole church of Christ, may receive remission of sins*, and all the other blessed effects of his passion. And that he, *who hath made a full, perfect, and sufficient sacrifice, oblation, and satisfaction for the sins of the whole world*, would cause his way to be known, and shew his saving health to the yet dark and unbelieving nations: and that all who do already know may walk worthy of it. And oh that the death this day tasted for every man may be effectual to the saving of every man! Even so, blessed Jesus, *by thine agony and bloody sweat, by thy cross and passion, good Lord deliver us*.

ε Rom. iv. 25.

† Coloss. ii. 15.

κ Heb. i. 8.

THE GOSPEL. St. John xix. 1.

- 1 *Then Pilate therefore took Jesus, and scourged him.*
- 2 *And the soldiers platted a crown of thorns, and put it on his head, and they put on him a purple robe,*
- 3 *And said, Hail, King of the Jews! and they smote him with their hands.*
- 4 *Pilate therefore went forth again, and saith unto them, Behold, I bring him forth to you, that ye may know that I find no fault in him.*
- 5 *Then came Jesus forth, wearing the crown of thorns, and the purple robe. And Pilate saith unto them, Behold the man!*
- 6 *When the chief priests therefore and officers saw him, they cried out, saying, Crucify him, crucify him. Pilate saith unto them, Take ye him, and crucify him: for I find no fault in him.*
- 7 *The Jews answered him, We have a law, and by our law he ought to die, because he made himself the Son of God.*
- 8 *When Pilate therefore heard that saying, he was the more afraid;*
- 9 *And went again into the judgment hall, and saith unto Jesus, Whence art thou? But Jesus gave him no answer.*
- 10 *Then saith Pilate unto him, Speakest thou not unto me? knowest thou not that I have power to crucify thee, and have power to release thee?*
- 11 *Jesus answered, Thou couldest have no power at all against me, except it were given thee from above: therefore he that delivered me unto thee hath the greater sin.*
- 12 *And from thenceforth Pilate sought to release him: but the Jews cried out, saying, If thou let this man go, thou art not Cæsar's friend: whosoever maketh himself a king speaketh against Cæsar.*
- 13 *When Pilate therefore heard that saying, he brought Jesus forth, and sat down in the judgment seat in a place that is called the Pavement, but in the Hebrew, Gabbatha.*
- 14 *And it was the preparation of the passover, and about the sixth hour: and he saith unto the Jews, Behold your King!*
- 15 *But they cried out, Away with him, away with him, crucify him. Pilate saith unto them, Shall I crucify your King? The chief priests answered, We have no king but Cæsar.*
- 16 *Then delivered he him therefore unto them to be crucified. And they took Jesus, and led him away.*
- 17 *And he bearing his cross went forth into a place called the place of a skull, which is called in the Hebrew Golgotha:*
- 18 *Where they crucified him, and two other with him, on either side one, and Jesus in the midst.*
- 19 *And Pilate wrote a title, and put it on the cross. And the writing was, JESUS OF NAZARETH THE KING OF THE JEWS.*
- 20 *This title then read many of the Jews: for the place where Jesus was crucified was nigh to the city: and it was written in Hebrew, and Greek, and Latin.*
- 21 *Then said the chief priests of the Jews to Pilate, Write not, The King of the Jews; but that he said, I am King of the Jews.*

22 *Pilate answered, What I have written I have written.*

23 *Then the soldiers, when they had crucified Jesus, took his garments, and made four parts, to every soldier a part; and also his coat: now the coat was without seam, woven from the top throughout.*

24 *They said therefore among themselves, Let us not rend it, but cast lots for it, whose it shall be: that the scripture might be fulfilled, which saith, They parted my raiment among them, and for my vesture they did cast lots. These things therefore the soldiers did.*

25 *Now there stood by the cross of Jesus his mother, and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Cleophas, and Mary Magdalene.*

26 *When Jesus therefore saw his mother, and the disciple standing by, whom he loved, he saith unto his mother, Woman, behold thy son!*

27 *Then saith he to the disciple, Behold thy mother! And from that hour that disciple took her unto his own home.*

28 *After this, Jesus knowing that all things were now accomplished, that the scripture might be fulfilled, saith, I thirst.*

29 *Now there was set a vessel full of vinegar: and they filled a sponge with vinegar, and put it upon hyssop, and put it to his mouth.*

30 *When Jesus therefore had received the vinegar, he said, It is finished: and he bowed his head, and gave up the ghost.*

31 *The Jews therefore, because it was the preparation, that the bodies should not remain upon the cross on the sabbath day, (for that sabbath day was an high day,) besought Pilate that their legs might be broken, and that they might be taken away.*

32 *Then came the soldiers, and brake the legs of the first, and of the other which was crucified with him.*

33 *But when they came to Jesus, and saw that he was dead already, they brake not his legs:*

34 *But one of the soldiers with a spear pierced his side, and forthwith came thereout blood and water.*

35 *And he that saw it bare record, and his record is true: and he knoweth that he saith true, that ye might believe.*

36 *For these things were done, that the scripture should be fulfilled, A bone of him shall not be broken.*

37 *And again another scripture saith, They shall look on him whom they pierced.*

COMMENT.

THE service of the church, and the scriptures already handled, have brought us down to the last act of our blessed Saviour's sufferings, and the particular manner of his expiring upon the cross. These therefore shall make the subject of our present meditation, according to the description given in the chapter now before us, (ver. 28, 29, 30.) viz. that Jesus, feeling himself afflicted with a vehement drought, usual upon the approach of death, but especially in that kind of death where extremity of pain and loss of blood exhaust the spirits in a more than ordinary degree, complained of thirst. For the quenching whereof when his insulting enemies offered him vinegar to drink, he meekly

submitted to their cruel mockery; and having moistened his holy mouth with it, said, *It is finished*; after which he presently bowed his head, and gave up the ghost.

There are two things especially observable from hence which require our very attentive consideration.

First, the true importance of that saying, *It is finished*; and,

Secondly, the particular manner of our Lord's dying. These I shall first explain, and then deduce from them some proper reflections.

I begin with the former,—the true importance of that saying, *It is finished*.

1. The first and most obvious interpretation seems to regard the prophecies concerning Christ. Which were so full and express, that there was not any one material circumstance, in this great concluding scene of his life especially, which had not been most exactly foretold many ages before. This shewed that all these things, however casual they might appear when they happened, were yet conducted all along by a wise and steady Providence, which so overruled the wills, the malice, and the wickedness of men, as to bring about what God had determined, and what none but he could have signified should be, so long before they came to pass. This was a method very agreeable to the design of Almighty God, whose revelations and dealings all tended to the mystery of man's redemption. That great and glorious work, in which his divine perfections should be most eminently conspicuous, which was of greatest consequence to the world, and which he therefore kept constantly in view, and made all other dispensations subservient to it.

This is the very reason why the apostles, in all their arguings with the Jews, insist so much upon the topic of prophecies. Because, according to the Jews' own principles, that person was to be looked upon as the true Messiah in whom these predictions were manifestly and punctually accomplished. Hence St. John, ver. 28, takes notice that Jesus therefore said, *I thirst, that the Scripture might be fulfilled*. The other prophecies relating to this matter, such as *being betrayed by his friend and companion, forsaken by his kindred and acquaintance, having his hands and his feet pierced, his garments parted, and lots cast upon his vesture*, had all been made good already. But there remained one more still, one acknowledged to belong to this matter. For David, complaining of the barbarity of his enemies, says, they were so far from extending their relief, or shewing any compassion to what he endured, that, on the contrary, they exasperated and triumphed in his sufferings. This pitiless cruelty he expresses by *giving him gall to eat, and when he was thirsty giving him vinegar to drink*.

Now David was confessed to be a type of Christ, and what he uttered upon these melancholy occasions had a higher and farther meaning than his own personal afflictions. And therefore it was necessary for the evangelist to shew that this also was really and literally true of Christ; and consequently those words had not yet received their utmost completion. So that, when our Lord, upon

receiving the vinegar, said, *It is finished*, we may reasonably understand him thus; that all the other predictions of things antecedent to his death had met with events answerable to them before: there was but one more unfinished, and since this too had been punctually made good, by the vinegar brought him to quench his thirst with in that last extremity, no circumstance of his sufferings was now omitted, whereby the prophets had distinguished and pointed him out to the Jews. Thus far all was managed in most exact order; and therefore the next thing he had to do was to die, which accordingly he did forthwith, for hereupon *he bowed his head, and gave up the ghost*.

2. Secondly, this saying of our blessed Lord is of great propriety and significance, if applied, as it may very reasonably be, to the types and figures of the Jewish law. For the law was a dispensation in the very nature and design of it imperfect, and preparatory to a more excellent one afterwards. This argument (as we have had frequent occasions to observe) is admirably made out in the Epistle to the Hebrews; where the apostle insists upon it, that even the most eminent places and persons, the most remarkable blessings and punishments in the civil capacity of the Jews, had a secret mystery, a distant prospect and meaning: but that the ceremonial part of their worship was entirely made up of shadow and image; and that Jesus Christ and his gospel, what he did and taught and suffered, was the real end and substance, the entire and intended accomplishment which Almighty God had in view, when he instituted those carnal ordinances and darker significations of his will and truly acceptable worship. This was most eminently the case in that branch of their service, by which they made the nearest approaches to Almighty God, and from whence they derived the greatest confidence in his favour. Their sacrifices, I mean, and those of them especially which were appointed and accepted by way of expiation for sin. And yet you have seen that the apostle makes it exceeding clear, even upon their own principles, that none of those sacrifices could be a just ground of confidence to sinners¹; that it was not possible they should have any efficacy of their own to the purposes they used them for. The power of taking away sin is a privilege, which not only the nature of the thing rendered them incapable of, but the frequent and daily repetition of the same sacrifices gave plain intimation of their being defective in. And therefore this was peculiar to another sacrifice, which was and needed to be offered but once only, because this high priest, *who takes away sin by the sacrifice of himself*, hath by that *one offering for ever perfected them that are sanctified*. This is part of the apostle's argument to the Hebrews in his ninth and tenth chapters. But withal, since Christ did not effect that great work till *the end of the world*, that is, till God made the last declaration of himself to mankind, and settled an institution, in the place whereof no other was to succeed; it was not expedient that the other antecedent and more imperfect dispensations should

¹ Epistle for fifth Sunday in Lent, Wednesday this week, and this day.

keep men void of all comfort and hope. These shewed men their disease and their misery; and if they could not apply, yet it was fit they should point out at least, and give them some prospect of their remedy. Almighty God therefore, in his wisdom and compassion, seems to have instituted sacrifices to show that he was not implacable, that he would admit of a ransom and proxy, and one day accept innocent blood as an atonement for the guilt of those that had offended him. Thus *the Lamb of God was slain from the foundation of the world*, not only in the intention and decree of his Father, but virtually in every one of those lambs, appointed and accepted for the sins of them who lived before this only expiatory sacrifice was actually offered upon the altar of the cross. But when that had been done, and the wrath of God was effectually appeased, there was an end of all bloody sacrifices. The substance was come, and the shadows were done away; there was no farther use of these, and, as useless for the future, they ceased of themselves. And therefore, in this sense too, our Saviour might most truly say, *It is finished*, because the legal expiations had now attained their full completion in the death he just then was about to undergo; and in the soul, which he voluntarily poured out, as an innocent, unblemished, a perfect and sufficient oblation and satisfaction for the transgressions of the whole world. Which leads us likewise to consider these words in a

3. Third most comfortable sense; as they import, that the great work of man's redemption, and all that was necessary for reconciling sinners to their incensed God, had been exactly and punctually performed by Christ suffering in the stead and for the sake of sinners. By which we are not however to understand, that Christ endured the very same punishments in kind and measure, which by the just decree of God were due to wilful and impenitent offenders. For these could be inflicted upon such only as had offended in their own persons. St. Peter urges the necessity of our Lord's resurrection, from the impossibility of his being holden of the pains of death. And if his innocence delivered him from the power of temporal, much more did it exempt him from that of eternal death. The torments of the damned are without end, without hope; and everlasting misery and despair could never be consistent either with the condition of one who had never deserved them, or with the assurance of his releasing his brethren from them. These are the consequences of disobedience and rebellion against God; but the sufferings of Jesus were most pleasing to God, an unexampled proof of his entire obedience in the highest and most difficult instance of submission; an act of duty and unspeakable charity, and so far from incurring his irreconcilable displeasure, that for this very cause ** God hath highly exalted him*. This purchased a reward for his human nature, and peace for those who, but for his sake, could not be pardoned and reconciled. It is true, God *bruised him sorely in the day of his fierce anger*; but he never loved him at any time more tenderly than when he was pleased thus to wound him.

He smote him, not for any misdemeanours of his own, in his private, but for ours, which in his public capacity, as the common representative of sinful mankind, he had taken upon himself; it was our burden which he carried, our iniquities for which he was chastised, and the stripes laid upon him made such deep impression, that by the anguish of his wounds we might be healed. Now in order to this, there was no need that the very same pains in every point should be inflicted upon him, which had not he submitted to suffer for us, we must ourselves have suffered; but it was only necessary that the injuries and affronts offered to the divine justice by the provocations of wicked men should receive a sufficient compensation; that the honour of God and his laws should be vindicated, and sin made as terrible and full of discouragement as it could possibly have been, though no such methods of mercy had been used to deliver us from the curse and condemnation of it. Now all these ends were fully satisfied by the Son of God condescending to suffer in our stead. Whatever was wanting in the duration or the extremity of those sufferings, was abundantly made up by the dignity of the person. This rendered him capable of purging our consciences by his sacrifice, because he offered himself to God through *the eternal Spirit*, that is, the divine, united to our human nature.

That union exalted the value of this oblation to an infinite degree, and paid a ransom to offended justice of more worth than a hundred thousand worlds. That gave men a clear proof how hateful sin is to God, who would not be prevailed with to remit it upon easier terms than the agonies and death of his only Son; and shewed how dreadful consequences they are to expect from their own faults, when even this most holy, this entirely beloved, this divine person, who did not, could not know any sin, hath undergone such bitter things for the sins of others. And lastly, this leaves the laws of God in their full force and obligation still; since the matter is so ordered, that none but the penitent and the virtuous shall ever reap any benefit by this passion: so that, though all have now leave to hope, and great encouragement to obey; yet none have the least shadow of pretence for presumption and neglect of their duty. For the end of those who continue in wickedness is in no degree better, nay in some respects it is infinitely worse, than if Christ had never died at all. *Thus have mercy and truth met together, and righteousness and peace have kissed each other*, in the wonderful contrivance of man's redemption. And this signification of these words pronounced by our Saviour here corresponds exactly with those at the 17th chap. ver. 4, 5. *I have glorified thee on the earth: I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do. And now, O Father, glorify thou me with thine own self.* For so likewise here, when he had run through all the bitter stages of his passion, endured every pain, sustained every conflict that was necessary, and acquitted himself as became him in them all, having now no longer business for life, he immediately resigned it. Which brings me to the

II. Second thing observable in the text, the particular manner of our Saviour's expiring upon the cross, as it is expressed in the last

clause of the 30th verse, *And he bowed his head, and gave up the ghost.* The original phrase may denote a delivering up, or, as himself expressed it, a committing his spirit into the hands of God, as a sacred trust, to be restored again and united to his body at the time prefixed by his own infinite wisdom: and plainly implies such a dissolution and actual separation of soul and body as every common man undergoes when he dies. Only with this difference, that what is in other men the effect of necessity, was in him a voluntary act, and the effect of his own free choice. And hence the generality of interpreters have thought that St. John takes notice, that Christ *bowed his head before he gave up the ghost*: whereas in common cases, the falling of the head follows after the breath's going out of the body. Hence also St. Mark observes, that Jesus crying out with so loud and strong a voice immediately before his expiring, was one reason that moved the centurion to think him an extraordinary person. For this shewed that nature was not quite spent in him, and that his death did not come on by such gradual and unavoidable decays as it usually does, when the voice is stopped and lost, and all the powers falter and languish some time before the soul's departure from its fleshly tabernacle. Accordingly we find that when the soldiers came to take down the bodies from the cross, they found him dead before those two others that were crucified with him: and that, when Joseph came to beg the body of Jesus, Pilate wondered to hear that he was dead so soon, and would not grant that request till he had first satisfied himself of the truth of it by inquiring of the officer who attended the execution.

Of all which the most probable account is, not that the excess of his pain and sorrow had tired out nature, and hastened his death; but that he, who, as himself professes, had *power to lay down his life*, and could not have it taken from him without his own permission and consent, did lay it down at such a time as himself saw convenient. Every step in this last act of his life was taken regularly and with deliberation: he bore a constant regard to all the mysterious purposes of this important death: he would not die till they were all fulfilled: and when they were so, he would not, because there was no occasion that required he should, live any longer. Never was there, never can there be, such a death in any instance; so perfectly free, so entirely at the person's own disposal. For he who struck his enemies down to the ground with his majestic presence, and afterwards gave them leave to apprehend him, could likewise, if he had so pleased, have come down from the cross. He could have continued insensible to all the pains of it, he could have survived the sharpest anguish, and, had he not suspended his divine power, death itself could not have taken hold on him, nor have bound this strong man, this infinitely more than man, in those chains, which he therefore submitted to, that he might break and burst them asunder shortly after in a more glorious and triumphant manner. Such was the decease of our blessed Redeemer, so voluntary and entirely his own; so wise and wonderful in every

circumstance; so victorious, even in that part of it which his enemies thought him vanquished by. So full of matter, so full of comfort, is that dying word of the blessed Jesus, treated of under my first head. So justly might he then, so joyfully may every Christian now cry out, *It is finished.*

The remainder of my discourse shall now be employed in some few reflections, arising from these considerations; such as, we do by no means remember this death like Christians indeed, if we do not feel ourselves very sensibly affected with.

Here then we may perceive how it came to pass, that this death was an act so noble and generous in itself, and so exceeding beneficial to us. For therefore is it a meritorious, because not only an invaluable, but a willing sacrifice. Therefore was this act of obedience so well pleasing to his Father, because, even in the most difficult and painful instances, it proceeded not from constraint, but from full consent and free choice. Upon this account his love to wretched man is so unspeakably tender and great, because it was in his power to have refused the giving us such costly proofs of his kindness. But though these are subjects upon which I might very seasonably and pathetically enlarge, yet having been upon them lately, that which I rather choose to say at present is, that by such a chosen and cheerful submission to die for our sakes, our Lord hath set us a pattern how we ought to behave ourselves to him, in return for such marvellous compassion and love; that we should think nothing too much to do, nothing too grievous to suffer for a Saviour, who of his own accord and mere grace hath done and suffered so much for us. To all persons who retain any spark of ingenuity, and have not sinned away all the principles of natural religion, nothing can be more clear and self-evident, than that they are bound to shew themselves sensible of and make what requital they can for kindnesses received. This is the ground of that significant expression used by St. Paul, *The love of Christ constraineth us to obedience.* And our blessed Saviour takes notice, that neither the darkness of the heathens nor the vicious lives of the publicans had extinguished that principle of *loving those that loved them.* And shall Christians be wanting in so plain a duty? Christians who have the brightest light to walk by, and are under the influence of the most powerful, most engaging example? For what religion ever carried the points of love and gratitude to so noble a height? What ever presented mankind with a pattern, that can pretend to bear any manner of proportion to the great, the unspeakable things our Master and Benefactor hath done for us? If we observe the kindness itself, the person who did it, and the persons for whom it was done, every circumstance is full of wonder and amazement. That God, who is by nature incapable of sufferings and death, should condescend to become mortal man, to qualify himself for enduring the bitterest afflictions; that he should do this for enemies and rebels—for such are wretched sinners; that the miseries of those who had most obstinately provoked and injured him, and merited his utmost indignation and wrath, should move his compassion to save their souls at the expense of his own life; that in the midst of sorrows

and agonies, of pains and torture, he should still persevere in this most gracious purpose, and not accept a deliverance till he had finished this laborious undertaking; that he should embrace poverty and hardship, reproach and ignominy, bodily anguish and death, with a ready and cheerful mind, when all the power of hell could not have compelled him to one single pang; this is such an instance of pity and friendship as no tenderness ever did or can compare with. And therefore we are of all creatures certainly the most insensible, the most inexcusable, if we do not take care to apply this example very warmly to our consciences; if we read this history of our dearest Redeemer's passion without very moving impressions, if we do not urge every branch of it home, and render it as effectual as it is designed and qualified to be, for the exciting in us the most irreconcilable hatred against sin, and kindling in us the most vigorous and ardent affection for our dying Saviour; I say again, such a hatred of sin, and such love of God and Christ, as this account is well qualified to excite in us. For what branch of our duty is there, which the sufferings of our Jesus, when carefully considered, do not furnish the strongest motives and most unanswerable arguments for? He commands us to repent of, that is, to be sorry for our past faults, and to forsake them for the time to come. And can we read the doleful story of this day, can we reflect that they were our iniquities for which he was bruised, our transgressions for which he was wounded in the day of God's fierce anger, without a deep and hearty remorse? Can we think that we contributed to his agonies and griefs, that the malicious Jews and barbarous soldiers were only the instruments of cruelty, but every sinful man in part the cause of all he suffered; and think it without aching hearts and overflowing eyes, without confusion of face and a multitude of self-condemning reproaches? Can we behold our dear Lord's temples pierced with thorns, his holy face besmeared with blood, his body torn with scourges, nailed to the cross, hanging there in convulsions, thirsting, fainting, bleeding, dying, in pity to us; and can we suffer ourselves to be familiar with and fond of those very lusts which injured, disgraced, tormented, and slew our best friend and most generous benefactor? Surely if men have any gratitude, if any bowels, this prospect, lively represented to their minds, must needs check their wildest career, and damp the hottest flames of vicious inclinations. Surely this thought would be a preservative sufficient against those evil practices which, we are told, do even now grieve this Saviour; and men must be ashamed to do despite to such a friend, and crucify the Son of God afresh, by enslaving themselves to their corrupt affections, from whose tyranny he died to deliver them. He hath told us that the proof he expects of our loving him is, to *keep his commandments*. And these are such commandments as it would be our duty and interest to keep, though he had never suffered for us. And shall we shew less cheerfulness in seeking our own happiness, than he did in taking upon him our misery and punishment? Did he most willingly die for us, and shall not we be content to live to him? To him, did I say? Nay, to ourselves: since it is not his own, but our advantage that he seeks, in ordering us to

be holy and good men? It may be, we shall find our duty enumbered with some difficulties, but what are our sharpest trials in comparison of his? Or how can any submission deserve to be named with that most condescending resignation whereby Christ offered himself freely to that sorrow, and shame, and pain, which he had no obligation to endure? He would not decline death in its most deformed and frightful shape; he would not spare himself one agony that might conduce to the perfecting our salvation; he exposed his innocence to the punishments he never deserved; and shall we grudge the obedience which the condition of servants and creatures lays upon us? Shall we resist the will of God concerning us, and murmur at the due reward, nay much less than the due reward of our evil deeds? He does indeed require that we forsake all and follow him, that we lay down our lives for his sake: but it is very seldom that he calls men to this last experiment of their sincerity and constancy. And yet if it were frequent, if it were sure to be the case of every common Christian, is not even this a reasonable case? Is it not a very poor return to what he hath done before us, and for us? We cannot say with him, we have power to lay down our lives, for these lives are not our own: they are God's gift, and always in his disposal. But he had a right to dispose of his; he could not have been mortal, had he not chosen to be so; his happiness was perfect before, and received no addition by all the miseries he endured for lost man; and when he chose a death for our advantage, which he was not liable to originally, shall not we submit to the manner of dying which God sees fittest, when die in some manner we unavoidably must? Shall we not be satisfied to exchange a worse life for a better, when otherwise, bad as it is, we must part with it for a worse? So highly reasonable are even the hardest conditions of a Christian's obedience. So prevalent would a serious consideration of our Lord's love and sufferings prove to reconcile us to those difficulties which flesh and blood are most apt to start and give back at. And therefore the proper use of this week's devotions is to inflame our affections, to quicken our endeavours, to arm us with patience, to encourage our perseverance to the end: to put us in mind, that we, like him, can only then lay down our heads with comfort when we can say, *It is finished*. When we measure our life, not by the length and number of our days, but by the business and design of it. No death can be hasty or unseasonable, which comes when a man hath satisfied the ends he lived for. No life is long, which determines before the purposes of living are made good and its work done. But happy, happy they, who after the most distressed, the most laborious, the most despised instances of their virtue, can sing this song of triumph to themselves, that they have been faithful in their charge, and done what it was their duty to do. If such partake in the afflictions and reproaches and death of their Saviour, they shall assuredly be recompensed with partaking in his resurrection. And when they give up the ghost, shall immediately enter into the joys of this their crucified Lord.

EASTER EVEN.

THE COLLECT.

GRANT, O Lord, that as we are baptized into the death of thy blessed Son our Saviour Jesus Christ, so by continual mortifying our corrupt affections we may be buried with him; and that through the grave and gate of death, we may pass to our joyful resurrection^m; for his merits, who died, and was buried, and rose again for us, thy Son Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

THE EPISTLE. 1 Peter iii. 17.

17 *For it is better, if the will of God be so, that ye suffer for well doing, than for evil doing.*

18 *For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the Spirit:*

friendship with God for sinful men; and being perfectly innocent, took the punishment of our sins upon him; but that body of his which thus died was raised again by that divine Spirit,

19 *By which also he went and preached unto the spirits in prison;*

20 *Which sometimes were disobedient, when once the long-suffering of God waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was a preparing, wherein few, that is, eight souls were saved by water.*

world, and by building the ark warned them of the judgment of God in the approaching deluge.

21 *The like figure whereunto even baptism doth also now save us (not the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God,) by the resurrection of Jesus Christ:*

But as there, it was not the water or the ark, but the righteousness and obedience of Noah that preserved him; so neither here is it the water which cleanses the flesh, but the covenant on this occasion solemnly stipulated, and the faithful observance of it, that saves us in baptism. The efficacy of which sacrament for our justification is assured to us by our Lord's rising again.

18. Of which suffering Christ hath left us a pattern, who died for the establishing an access to and friendship with God for sinful men; and being perfectly innocent, took the punishment of our sins upon him; but that body of his which thus died was raised again by that divine Spirit,

20. Which was always urging wicked men to repentance, and by the impulse whereof Noah preached repentance to the old

21. And his family saved by the ark swimming on the water, was a type of the church of Christ, saved by the sacrament of baptism.

^m Rom. iv. 3, 4, 5, 11, 12; Gal. ii. 20. vi. 14; Coloss. ii. 11, 12.

22 *Who is gone into heaven, and is on the right hand of God; angels and authorities and powers being made subject unto him.* 22. Who, from and for his sufferings and humiliation here below, is now with his human body vested with supreme authority in heaven, and ruler of the whole intellectual world. For of what degree or dignity soever the spirits that compose it be, all of them are entirely subject to his government.

COMMENT.

THE Epistle for this day, like the day itself, presents to our minds two differing views; the one, a retrospect upon our dying, the other, a most comfortable prospect upon our risen Lord. With regard to the former, we are by his example excited to patience in our sufferings, even when those sufferings are extreme and unjust. With regard to the latter, we are informed, that our Lord returned to life by virtue of that eternal Spirit, which, long before his incarnation, strove with sinful men, by seasonable instructions and warnings, to prevent the dismal consequences of a God provoked to anger. The inefficacy of which good office brought destruction upon the old world, except one obedient family, by the sweeping of a deluge, dreadful and general as the impieties that had let it in upon them.

That deliverance we likewise learn from hence to have been a figure of the sacrament of baptism, by which (as the ark containing Noah and his family was of the church, in which) alone, (ordinarily) men can be saved from their sins here, and everlasting death hereafter. The efficacy of this sacrament is here ascribed, not to the outward element applied to the body, but to the inward disposition of the mind in them who are received by it into this spiritual ark. This disposition is to be expressed by declarations of the party's willingness to enter into covenant with God, and to expect salvation upon the terms of the gospel. A part of baptism so necessary, that it does not appear that it anciently was, or that it ever ought to be, administered without such declaration. And therefore such consent is rightly demanded of all baptized persons: expected from all of years and discretion to be given by themselves: accepted in infants, by the charity of the church, from sureties in their name; but required to be personally ratified by these too in the too much neglected rite of confirmation, at a time when they are capable of contracting for their part of this covenant.

The salvation attained by thus entering into covenant with God is most rightfully ascribed here to our Lord's resurrection. That being the evidence that the sins he died for were fully expiated, and immortality restored to the nature in which he died. The release of our surety was in all reasonable construction an acknowledgment that our debt was fully satisfied, and a sufficient foundation for the firmest faith in the *merits of him who died, and was buried, and rose again for us.*

But faith alone, we know, is not sufficient. Every important article of the Christian religion ought to have a powerful influence upon our

practice. And therefore neither do we consider nor believe our Lord's burial aright, unless that also be imitated and drawn into example. It is a pious observation, frequent among the fathers, that every one of the great lines in the scheme of our redemption was set for us to copy after : and that the principal actions of our blessed Saviour are to be looked on, not only as historical, but full of mystical instruction and intimations of somewhat to be done by every Christian too, in correspondence with their great Master. Nor is this to be thought a flight of warm zeal, for Scripture itself abundantly justifies that notion ; which is indeed the plain importance of several passages to the Romans, Galatians, and Colossians.

Now as at other times the apostle enlarges concerning our *being crucified, dying, and rising again with Christ* ; so in the sixth to the Romans, he mentions *being buried with Christ by baptism into death* ; and again in the second to the Colossians, *buried with him in baptism, wherein also ye are risen with him*.

These expressions, whatever allusion they may have to that ceremony, used in hotter climates, of immersing the body of the baptized person entirely, which answers to the burial of Christ, as emerging out of the water again resembles his rising out of the grave ; yet do they certainly imply a great deal more. Our sins are said to be *borne by Christ in his own body on the tree, the body of sin to be crucified with him* ; and, by parity of reason, to be buried in his grave. As therefore, in the professions of faith made at baptism, every Christian declares his belief that the body of Christ was really dead and buried ; so he obliges himself to effect that upon his own sins and lusts, which actually passed upon Christ's natural body ; that is, to mortify and kill his corrupt affections and desires, and not suffer them to act and move, and draw him into sin, any more than the carcase, when the soul is gone, and it is laid into the earth, can any longer perform the offices of a living and animated body. And as the change of a man from evil to good consists in first *ceasing to do evil*, and then *learning to do well* ; so we must first of all *put off the old man*, and extinguish the principles of corruption and sin in our hearts, before we can proceed to virtuous dispositions and actions, and be moved by the principles of a new and spiritual life. The former of these is imported by *dying to sin, and dying with Christ* ; as the latter is denoted by *being risen with him, and quickened to righteousness* and true holiness, by the *same Spirit which raised Christ from the dead*. As therefore the death of Christ is amply confirmed by his being buried ; so we must, in proportion, so effectually put off our lusts and corruptions, as to shew that they have no longer any life or power left in us. As again his death and burial led us to his resurrection, without which they had not answered the purpose of his dying ; so to forsake our old sins and bury them in his grave does not answer the character of Christians, unless we complete the work by living after another manner, and testify the power of his Spirit in us, by a new and pure and holy conversation. And because this is what every one

engages for when he enters *into covenant with Christ by baptism*; therefore every Christian is said to be *buried and to rise with him* in that holy sacrament. Not only in regard of the ceremonies representing these actions to our outward senses; but much more in respect of the conditions there undertaken for, and the efficacy of that grace which the outward signs are constantly attended and seconded with; where the wickedness and ingratitude of the party does not hinder and put a bar to it. Let us then, my brethren, look upon ourselves in the circumstances wherein Christ is represented this day, dead to our trespasses and sins as he was to the world; buried as he was, to shew there are no remains of our former wicked life in us. As he *died once only, to return no more to corruption*, so let our repentance and the forsaking of our sins be without any wilful relapse; for otherwise we do not die, as he did, *once for all*. We incur the absurdity of moving when we are dead, and of being buried alive, so long as our corruptions live in us; and as he rose again to live for ever, so let us enter upon a new course to last as long as ourselves do upon earth, and to be perfected by a glorious and blessed immortality in heaven.

THE GOSPEL. St. Matth. xxvii. 57.

57 *When the even was come, there came a rich man of Arimathæa, named Joseph, who also himself was Jesus' disciple:*

58 *He went to Pilate, and begged the body of Jesus. Then Pilate commanded the body to be delivered.*

59 *And when Joseph had taken the body, he wrapped it in a clean linen cloth,*

60 *And laid it in his own new tomb, which he had hewn out in the rock: and he rolled a great stone to the door of the sepulchre, and departed.*

61 *And there was Mary Magdalene, and the other Mary, sitting over against the sepulchre.*

62 *Now the next day, that followed the day of the preparation, the chief priests and Pharisees came together unto Pilate,*

63 *Saying, Sir, we remember that that deceiver said, while he was yet alive, After three days I will rise again.*

64 *Command therefore that the sepulchre be made sure until the third day, lest his disciples come by night, and steal him away, and say unto the people, He is risen from the dead: so the last error shall be worse than the first.*

65 *Pilate said unto them, Ye have a watch: go your way, make it as sure as ye can.*

66 *So they went, and made the sepulchre sure, sealing the stone, and setting a watch.*

COMMENT.

It is worth our observation, that the evangelists are not more circumstantial in any particular relating to our blessed Saviour than in that part which concerns his burial; which seems to be done, not so

much for the sake of any consequence that action is of, considered apart by itself, as for the service it does to the proof of some things which went before and followed after it. For the two great points of the Christian religion being the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, it was necessary that all possible conviction should be given to the world of these two most important passages. Were we not well assured of his being really dead, we could not be certain that an atonement was made for the sins of the world; and had we any reasonable ground to doubt the truth of his resurrection, we could not depend upon that atonement being accepted. Now what the Holy Spirit hath thought fit to record of his burial is so ordered as to leave no just suspicion, either that our Lord's body was actually dead, or that the same body which so died was actually restored to life again. This is what the Gospel for the day gives very full evidence of. Especially when considered with its parallel texts in the other evangelists, which I shall call to my assistance in such manner, as may best conduce to the making both this death and resurrection of our Lord beyond all contradiction clear from his burial now before us.

Now here we must observe,

I. First, The persons concerned in this action. And,

II. Secondly, *The several circumstances of the action itself.* After which,

III. Thirdly, I shall leave the whole upon you with some practical inferences.

1. I begin with the persons concerned in this action, the principal of which was Joseph of Arimathæa; of whom the gospels give us this farther description, that he was a *rich man*, and an *honourable counsellor*, *a good man*, and a *just*: one who *had not consented to the counsel and deed of them who persecuted and condemned Jesus to death*; but was himself a *disciple of his, though secretly for fear of the Jews*. In all which passages there is something material; as I shall shew, by speaking very briefly to each of them as they lie in order.

His riches and honourable station are mentioned, not out of any vanity and ostentation, that a person of so considerable a figure should pay respect to the body of our blessed Master; but partly to intimate the interest and easy access he found with Pilate; and partly to shew how strangely God brought about an ancient prophecy concerning the Messiah, that notwithstanding the infamous manner of his dying, he should yet *make his grave with the rich at his death*. Now this in itself was a most unlikely thing; for the bodies of them that were crucified did, by the Roman laws, hang upon the gibbet, exposed to all the injuries of weather, and a prey for ravenous beasts and fowls of the air. And though the Jewish institution did not allow of this severity to the dead, yet did they usually bury their malefactors in some public neglected and ignominious place. Hence the Jews themselves besought Pilate, that all the bodies might be taken away, to prevent the pro-

fanation of their great festival, and the breach of God's ordinance, by their continuing upon the cursed tree. And thus they disposed of the two thieves, in all probability, as was usual in all other cases of this nature. But the making a distinction between them and Jesus, who was crucified with them, was the act of Joseph; he applied himself to the governor, in whose disposal the bodies of executed persons were, and treated it with that becoming honour which we shall have occasion to observe by and by.

In the mean while we are to take notice, that the next character under which we find him is that of a counsellor; which denotes him to have been a member of the Jewish sanhedrim, that very assembly of chief priests and rulers which laid wait for Jesus; which charged him with blasphemy; which used him with so much cruelty and contempt; which, when their own power would not extend to inflict that death determined for the Messiah, arraigned him of sedition before Pilate; and when he saw through the thinness of this frivolous pretence, and was disposed to release him, instigated the people to accept of a robber and a murderer; and to demand that he might be crucified. So that when the apostles had told us that this person was one of that body, it was but necessary to acquit him from the imputation of the common guilt, to satisfy the world, that though he was of them, he did not act with them; and for this reason St. Luke clears him of having any hand in their villanies, and distinguishes him from his wicked fellows by saying that *he was a good man and a just*, and had not consented to *the counsel and deed* of the rest. Nay, St. Matthew adds here, that *he himself was Jesus' disciple*, but yet with some degree of infirmity; for St. John tells us, it *was secretly for fear of the Jews*. Many such, he tells us, there were among the chief rulers, who were convinced by his doctrine and miracles; but they kept their opinion to themselves, and had not the courage to own it publicly. How long the rest walked under this disguise we know not; but it may well seem strange that Joseph, who never durst openly profess a regard to Jesus while living, should now, when he had suffered all the ignominy of a malefactor, and his enemies thought they had effectually rid their hands of him, not stick to interest himself for the honourable interment of a dead master; that he should expose himself to the insults and contempt of his brethren, for a teacher in all appearance lost and gone; who had not the hardiness to acknowledge him while the power of his instructions and miracles spoke him more than man, and had gained him a general admiration. And yet (to see the efficacy of those impressions which God makes upon men's minds, even at the most unlikely seasons of prevailing) this man, who durst not join with multitudes before in paying Jesus the least respect, ventures now to stand single; *goes in boldly to Pilate*, as St. Mark expresses it, and does the office usual for dearest friends and relations. He begs the body, that he might vindicate it from the contemptuous usage of common malefactors; and thus to declare that he thought him a person so distant from what he had been represented and put to death for, as even to be worthy the highest honours his condition

was capable of, and received with all the affection and respect due to his own kindred and family. For all this is intended by laying him *in his own new tomb*, and those other circumstances contained in the action itself.

2. St. John adds, that Nicodemus likewise contributed to this funeral by bringing a great quantity of spices and ointments, and so embalming the body, as the custom of that country was, to preserve it from corruption. All which seems to imply that the saying of Jesus, so often repeated, of his rising again the third day, had made but slender impression upon them, as we indeed shall find hereafter it did upon the apostles themselves. God in his wisdom suffering them to be unmindful of, or very little affected with, a persuasion which had rendered all this care unnecessary; that so this insensibility of forgetfulness might make way for more satisfactory and unquestionable proofs of his Son's resurrection.

I proceed now to my second head, where it will be necessary to observe these few following particulars :

I. First, The preparation of the body for burial.

II. Secondly, The interment itself.

III. Thirdly, The description of the place where he was laid.

1. First, Here is the preparation of the body for burial, expressed by wrapping it in *a clean linen cloth*. By this, no doubt, we are to understand all the burying clothes usual among the Jews. Such as we find particularly described by St. John in his eleventh chapter; where he mentions Lazarus coming out of his grave *bound hand and foot, and his face bound about with a napkin*; and in his twentieth chapter, where he tells us, that Peter, after our Lord's resurrection, went into the empty sepulchre, *and saw the linen clothes lie in their due order, and the napkin, that was about Jesus's head, not lying with the rest of the clothes, but wrapped together in a place by itself*.

2. Secondly, The next thing observable is the interment itself, described by Joseph's laying the body thus wound and embalmed *in his own tomb*. The Jews appear, by many passages in the Old Testament, to have been in all ages extremely solicitous concerning the place of their burial; to have esteemed it a curse *not to sleep with their fathers*, (as we often find it phrased,) that is, not to lie among those of their own race and family. Hence such as were wealthy among them purchased parcels of ground, that they might have a property distinct from other people, and suffered none but those of their own house to partake in them. The care of Abraham in buying a field for this purpose from the children of Heth, seems to have proceeded from a desire that the bodies of those that worshipped the one true God might not be mingled with idolaters. And possibly the field mentioned in this chapter to be *bought for burying strangers in*, might be intended to hinder foreigners, or those who were not entirely within the covenant, from having, even in death, any fellowship with those who looked upon themselves as a holy and peculiar people of God. But the appro-

priating sepulchres to particular persons and families was in use long before our Saviour's time. And this was done by purchasing some piece of ground near their respective cities, (for within the cities none might be buried,) and there make a convenient repository for themselves and those that belonged to them. Such was this of Joseph, in a garden not far from the place where our Lord was crucified; and as a mark of his great veneration, here he deposited the body of Jesus, where he designed to lay his own and theirs whom nature and affection had made dearest and of most honourable regard to him.

And having advanced thus far, I ought not to proceed before putting you in mind, how uncontestable a proof these things are that our Lord's body was actually dead. Pilate was so cautious in the matter, that he would not grant Joseph's request till the centurion, who commanded the guard ordered to attend the execution, had first satisfied him that Jesus had been some time dead. Joseph was his disciple and his friend, and would not have treated the body of one whom he honoured and loved in such a manner as must needs have destroyed all remains of life, had there been any in it. And I know not what proof of this matter can be possibly desired more, than that a man's enemies have the killing, and his friends have the burying of him; the one will be sure not to leave or deliver him up before he be dead; and the other will be as careful not to bury him till after he is so.

3. I come now to the third branch of my second head, which consists in a description of the tomb wherein our Lord's body was laid. Every circumstance whereof is of weight. And as the former particulars abundantly evince the reality of his death, so this is a strong confirmation to the truth of his resurrection.

1. Now the evangelist takes notice, first of all, that this was *a new tomb*; and St. Luke expresses the same thing by calling it *a tomb wherein never man before was laid*. The dead among the Jews were unclean, and whosoever touched a carcass did thereby contract a legal pollution. It was not therefore fit for him, who died not, as other men do, for the punishment of their own sins; for him, upon whom not any blemish of the Levitical dispensation could ever take hold; for him, who came to render the ceremonial ordinances useless after a full performance of them; but especially for him, to whose human nature the divine was inseparably united, to lay that body, with which God was essentially present, even in the grave, among the putrified remains of common sinners. But besides the indignity which this would have been to that flesh ordained to see no corruption, this is also a considerable circumstance for the proof of his rising again. We read in the Old Testament of a man restored to life by being cast into Elisha's grave; which was a miracle owing to the efficacy of that great prophet's bones. Had therefore our Lord been laid where any other person had lain before, his enemies might suspect that some of those others had risen from the dead; or at least that he had risen by a virtue derived from some of them. But now, being the first and the only person interred in this tomb, when his body left this sepulchre empty, no suspicion could remain of its being any other body than that

which Joseph had taken down from the cross, and disposed of in that place; or of his being restored to life again by any virtue and power but his own.

2. A second remark upon this occasion is, that his tomb was *hewn out of a rock*. This is agreeable to the fashion of that country, where they choose to make their sepulchres as durable as might be. In order hereunto they cut them in solid stone, and made as many niches of the proportion of a human body as they designed persons to be deposited in them. And this obviates another objection industriously put about by the Jews, *that his disciples stole the body away*, and then imposed upon the world with a confident but false report of their Master's being risen from the dead. Now such a sepulchre as this was not capable of being undermined, or having any conveyance made for removing the body, as loose earth might have been. There could be no possible way for the person deposited in a place so contrived to get out again, except only at the mouth or door of the cave, by which he was at first laid into it. And this too was rendered as impracticable as the former, by that which the evangelist hath told us in the next words, which is,

3. Thirdly, That Joseph *rolled a great stone to the door of the sepulchre*. This stone, St. Mark observes, was very great; so great that the women, who came in the morning of our Lord's resurrection with a pious intent to do their last honours to him, were in pain to think what assistance they should find sufficient for rolling it away, and so getting a free access to the body. All which confutes that fond opinion of his disciples' stealing him away: but yet much more so does that vain caution used by the Pharisees in the latter end of this chapter. Who, to make all, as they imagined, sure, obtained of Pilate to have the stone sealed, and the sepulchre watched by a strong guard of soldiers. This sentry would not suffer the body to be conveyed out by this, nor the nature of the place by any other way. Our Lord himself, had he not been more than man, could not have forced a passage out. And we are told accordingly that a divine power burst all these bars asunder; an earthquake and an angel rolled away the stone: and that by an operation so amazing, that the keepers could not withstand, could not sustain it; for *they became all as dead men, trembling for fear, and running affrighted into the city to tell what was done*.

Thus you see of what mighty significance it is to us that such a punctual description is given the world of our blessed Lord's burial, and all the circumstances relating to it. The persons concerned, the manner of treating his body, the place where it was laid, all contributing great strength to those two most important articles of the Christian faith—the death and resurrection of Jesus. I proceed now, in the last place, to lay before you some reflections from this subject, and what hath been said upon it. And they are these that follow:

1. First, we may learn from hence, why the Christian church hath been so careful to insert into her creeds and solemn confessions of faith this burial of Christ, as well as his crucifixion, death, and resurrection; because this hath so close a connexion with those other

fundamental doctrines, that we must have wanted a great and very substantial part of the evidence both of his being dead and of his rising again, had we not unquestionable assurances of his being buried.

2. Secondly, Here we have an example of that common humanity of burying the dead. This is what all countries have, according to their respective customs, been careful of; as a respect due to that dwelling of flesh, once honoured with so noble an inhabitant as a rational soul. And mankind seem to have been all along very tender and much concerned for it: not only from the practice of the thing to the generality of people, but by making it a punishment, and mark of infamy and the last detestation, to deny this privilege to such malefactors as have forfeited all right to the respects which others challenge from us. Particularly among Christians, the custom of burning the dead and preserving their ashes hath been disused, and the bodies of their deceased laid up entire in the grave, with such solemnities, and in such manner, as might intimate their belief of a future resurrection. And though the vain expense of pompous funerals be one of those extravagancies which proceed from pride and luxury, yet the pattern here before us will bear us out in all the expressions of a decent respect for the memory of those whom God takes away from us. We are not to be condemned for every sort of cost upon these occasions; as may be plainly gathered from that remarkable passage of our Lord's commending highly the piety of that woman, who spent three hundred pennyworth of spikenard very precious to anoint his body to the burial: he would not have promised that this action should be spread far and wide as the gospel itself in her praise; he would not have suffered such honourable mention to be made of Joseph and Nicodemus, and the women who brought spices and ointments to his sepulchre, if these had been blamable expenses. And what this pattern of humility and meekness allowed, it would be too delicate a niceness in us to condemn. If the regard due to a human soul rendered some respect to the dead a principle that manifested itself to the common sense of all nations, shall we think that less care is due to the bodies of Christians who once entertained a more glorious inhabitant, and were living temples of the Holy Ghost? Those bodies which were consecrated to the service of God, which bore their part in the duties of religion, fought the good fight of faith and patience, self-denial and mortification, and underwent the fatigue of many hardships and afflictions, for the sake of piety and virtue? Those bodies which we own to be still under the care of a divine providence? And what God disdains not to take into his protection, we ought not to look upon as outcast and common dung, or despise as unworthy our regard. Those bodies which we believe shall one day be *fashioned like unto Christ's glorious body*, awakened again from their sleep of death, have all their scattered particles of dust summoned together into their due order, and made partakers of the same glory with their immortal souls, as once they were of the same sufferings and good works: those bodies which are members of Christ, and are already, in him their

representative, exalted to the throne of God on high. These considerations prevailed with the primitive Christians to bury their dead with much solemnity, and particular testimonies of grave and decent respect; to commit them to the ground with prayers for their restitution, with praises of the virtues they had been useful in the exercise of while living, and with ample recommendations of their good example to the imitation of those that survived. All which was so far from being reproached with superstition, that it is ever reported as a laudable custom, and such as had something in it so engaging, so agreeable to the notions of civilized nature, as to have a very considerable influence upon the heathens who observed and admired it. It became instrumental in the disposing them to a very favourable opinion first, and afterwards, upon a closer inquiry, to embracing the Christian faith, where these decencies and tender regards to deceased friends and good people were so constantly, so carefully, so religiously practised.

Lastly, The consideration of our blessed Saviour's burial may help to rectify our notions concerning death and the grave. That holy body of his, which by descending into the river of Jordan sanctified the water, hath in some sense sanctified the dust of the earth by condescending to be laid in it. It hath changed our graves from seats of rottenness and everlasting corruption to beds and chambers, whither, after his example, we retire, and lie down a while; but it is only to refresh ourselves, and rest from our labours. There is a principle of life in us all the while, though for the present it be bound up in sleep, and cease from action. Our night will not last always, but after we have taken our soft repose the day will dawn, and we shall be awakened, and rise more fresh than from our beds, full of life and vigour. And O that we could reflect seriously upon this, and live like men that look for such a day! that glorious, that amazing day, when the dry bones shall live, when the prisons of the earth shall be unlocked, and the mould quickened into life! when every soul shall take her proper body; and the earth and the sea and every element bring back these scattered particles, and restore them to their primitive form! when the power of God Almighty, which first made man out of dust, and that dust out of nothing, shall once more exert itself, by making that dust the man it was before! And happy those blessed men who then can bear the sound of the last trump; whose consciences do not then sting them with terror, nor the gnawing worm within anticipate the condemnation of the dreadful tribunal. Who can express the comfort of those righteous souls, who then shall meet their Saviour in the clouds; not as an angry judge, but as a friend and deliverer; as one who comes to rescue them from rottenness and corruption, to crown their faithfulness, and give them full possession of their hopes; nay, to pour upon them the riches of his mercy, and to fix them in the enjoyment of bliss unspeakable, unchangeable, and full of glory? For *such honour have all his saints*; and this is the portion of every one *that loves the Lord Jesus in sincerity and truth*. And that it may be ours, as it behoves us constantly to endeavour, so are we taught very excellently to pray, in that pious collect of our

church on this day. And O that it may please thee, good Lord, to grant, that as we are baptized into the death of thy blessed Son our Saviour Jesus Christ, so by continually mortifying our corrupt affections, we may be buried with him; and that, through the grave and gate of death, we may pass to our joyful resurrection, for his merits, who died, and was buried, and rose again for us, the same Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

EASTER DAY.

THE COLLECT.

ALMIGHTY GOD, who through thy only begotten Son Jesus Christ hast overcome death, and opened unto us the gate of everlasting life; We humbly beseech thee, that as by thy special grace preventing us thou dost put into our minds good desires, so by thy continual help we may bring the same to good effect, through Jesus Christ our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

THE EPISTLE. Coloss. iii. 1.

1 *If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God.*

2 *Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth.*

consider where he is, and let your desires and cares be there also; even up in heaven, and the glories of that blessed place.

3 *For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God.*

4 *When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with him in glory.*

the excellence of this do not yet appear, because he who now lives in our human nature is absent and unseen; yet, when he comes again, the glories of it shall be manifested in the person, not of him only, but of every good Christian.

5 *Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth; fornication, uncleanness,*

1, 2. If, then, by the profession of faith made in your baptism, and a newness of life agreeable thereto, ye are conformed to Christ's resurrection,

3, 4. The spiritual life ye now lead, ye live by him; the immortal one ye hope to lead, ye owe to him your title and hopes of: and though the

5, 6, 7. In the meanwhile be careful to subdue those

ness, inordinate affection, evil concupiscence, and covetousness, which is idolatry :

6 For which things' sake the wrath of God cometh on the children of disobedience :

7 In the which ye also walked some time, when ye lived in them.

body.) For these are great provocations to God, and were renounced by you at your conversion to Christianity.

lusts which have no farther ends than earthly pleasures, (and which — with respect to sin in general, sometimes called the body of sin—may be styled members of that

COMMENT.

THE Epistle for this day is designed to enforce the duties and virtuous dispositions which are natural consequences of the belief of a Saviour risen from the dead. Whom when we consider as now in full possession of immortality, living and reigning in heaven in human nature, his happiness is the pledge of all theirs, who, partaking of that nature, shall perform the conditions left upon them as necessary to qualify them for partaking in the same happiness also. Of these the apostle mentions two, which do indeed include all the rest. (1) *The setting our affections on things above.* Of which, and the motive to it here (this volume having already exceeded its just measures), I rather choose to treat upon a fit occasion like to offer itself very shortly^b. The second thing, which is truly in order to the former, is an effectual subduing of those lusts and inordinate appetites, which, above all things, obstruct that heavenly temper of mind. Of these, and the arguments urged here against them, the provocation they give to God, and the contradiction they are to our Christian profession, I have already had occasion to discourse at large, in the Epistles for the second and third Sundays in Lent, to which I refer my reader.

At present I only add, that as our first entrance into covenant with God by baptism (which is an emblem of our Lord's death and resurrection) is the spiritual birth of a Christian; so the conscientious perseverance in the obedience there covenanted for is his spiritual life. Both which we most truly acknowledge, owing to the dwelling of that *c Spirit in us which raised Christ from the dead.* And if, besides, we reflect on the numbers who in the primitive church were received by that sacrament, which at this festival yearly began to be most solemnly administered, and whereunto the preceding fast of Lent was a solemn preparation; these things, laid all together, may suffice to set the wisdom of our Church above any just exception in appointing a collect not only pious and useful, but alluding, and by no means foreign, to the subject of the day.

THE GOSPEL. St. John xx. 1.

1 The first day of the week cometh Mary Magdaleno early, when it was yet dark,

1. The Sabbath being now over, in reverence to which

^b Ascension Day.

^c Rom. viii. 11.

unto the sepulchre, and seeth the stone taken away from the sepulchre. the women, who had prepared spices and ointments to embalm our Lord's body, had forborne attempting to do it hitherto (compare Luke xxiii. 56, Matt. xxviii. 1). As soon as the morning began to dawn on the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James and Joses, Salome, Joanna, and some other devout women that had followed Jesus from Galilee (compare Luke viii. 3, xxiv. 10, Matt. xxviii. 1, Mark xvi. 1), having before observed the sepulchre and the position of the body (Luke xxiii. 55), came with intention to anoint it. In their passage they had represented to themselves the difficulty of removing the stone which had been rolled to shut up the cave, and sealed with Pilate's own signet (Matt. xxvii. 60, 66, Mark xvi. 3); but arriving at the place, they found the stone removed to their hands, and the access open to the cave, and in the grave itself two angels sitting, by whom they were told that Jesus was not there, but was risen; as he had before declared he would do (Matt. xxviii. 2—8, Mark xvi. 5—8, Luke xxiv. 2—9).

2 *Then she runneth, and cometh to Simon Peter, and to the other disciple, whom Jesus loved, and saith unto them, They have taken away the Lord out of the sepulchre, and we know not where they have laid him.*

2. With this account, much astonished, and affrighted at the vision of angels, they hasten back to the place where the eleven apostles and some other believers were assembled (Mark xvi. 8, Matt. xxviii. 8, Luke xxvi. 10), and having made no mention of what they had seen and heard to any person till they came thither, Mary Magdalene, accompanied with and in the name of the other women, acquainted them with all that had passed, addressing herself more particularly to Peter and John.

3 *Peter therefore went forth, and that other disciple, and came to the sepulchre.*

4 *So they ran both together: and the other disciple did outrun Peter, and came first to the sepulchre.*

5 *And he stooping down, and looking in, saw the linen clothes lying; yet went he not in.*

6 *Then cometh Simon Peter following him, and went into the sepulchre, and seeth the linen clothes lie,*

7 *And the napkin, that was about his head, not lying with the linen clothes, but wrapped together in a place by itself.*

8 *Then went in also that other disciple, which came first to the sepulchre, and he saw, and believed.*

9 *For as yet they knew not the scripture, that he must rise again from the dead.*

6, 7. The grave-clothes here mentioned, and the manner of their being wrapped about the body, will be better understood, if we consult the description of Lazarus when raised by our Lord (chap. xi. 44).

8, 9. St. John now believed the whole account given him by Mary of the earthquake, the angels, &c. Or, upon this evidence, he

believed our Lord to be risen ; though not upon the evidence of the prophecies concerning him ; which as yet were not sufficiently understood by the apostles.

10 *Then the disciples went away again unto their own home.*

COMMENT.

How different, my brethren, is this morning's solemnity from those which lately called us to the house of God ! How happy the change from lamentation and mourning and woe, the tragedy of a bleeding and dying Saviour, to joy and gladness, and the triumphs of a living and victorious one ! *For this is the day which the Lord hath made.* He hath made it high and holy above the rest by rising from the dead ; by being born a second time ; born from the womb of the earth ; born now, not so as to prove himself man, but God. This is that most mysterious day that opened the gates of hell, and brought a release to the prisoners of the grave ; that turned our Saviour's cross into a lasting trophy, and brought honour to that once accursed tree ; that changed his crown of thorns into a ray of glory, and, by a wonderful effect, produced immortality out of death, and everlasting renown out of shame and contempt. This is that day peculiar to Christians ; and which distinguishes us from all the world besides. The day of our Lord's nativity Jews and Gentiles will confess ; that of his passion all the adversaries of our religion boast of, supposing they had foiled and vanquished this champion of souls ; but this day of his resurrection none but we can celebrate, because none but we acknowledge that he came off with conquest, and defeated all that malice which endeavoured his utter destruction. Let us therefore be glad and rejoice in this Christian jubilee ; for our last and most formidable enemy is now destroyed. All his attempts upon the Captain of our salvation were weak and vain, and all the force of hell cannot now prevail against them that fight under his standard. For this is our security, this our rejoicing, that the Lord is risen, yea, the Lord is risen indeed. *"The Lamb, who was slain, now liveth again, and, behold, he is alive for evermore ; and hath the keys of death and hell.* So essential and so distinguishing a mark of a Christian, and so just a joy is that, which the apostles first, and after them the churches of God, put on this day. This was the only thing that could put an end to the sorrows and doubts and confounding fears, the terrors and sad misgivings of the disciples. They had indeed some intimations given them by our Lord in his lifetime that the third day should restore him ; but the thing itself, of rising from the dead, was so exceeding strange, so wholly new, that it made little impression upon their minds. Or, if it had, grief and disorder had quite rased that out, and all those thoughts expired with their Master upon the cross. Affliction seems to have had the same effect upon the apostles which it

generally hath upon melancholy and dejected spirits; the possessing them with strong prejudices and distrusts, and not suffering them to see so much as the possibility of an event most desirable to them. The first hint they had was from Mary Magdalene, and other zealous women; who, as soon as the sabbath was over, went early with a preparation of spices and ointments, to pay their last respects of embalming our Lord's body. These return with the surprising account of the stone being rolled away from the door of the cave; and the sepulchre found open. Upon this message Peter and John resolve to satisfy themselves, and eagerly make toward the place. John contents himself with stooping down and looking in, but Peter, something more curious, goes into the very place where the body had lain; and there he sees the *linen clothes lie, and the napkin, that was about his head, not lying with the linen clothes, but wrapped together in a place by itself.* This astonishing sight invites the other disciple to take a closer view too. And accordingly he also *went in, and saw, and believed.* But there is reason enough to suspect that all he believed as yet was no more than what Mary had told them at the second verse; *that the Lord was taken away out of the sepulchre*, and she could not tell what was become of him. For that all these circumstances convinced them that he was alive again, and had removed himself, seems not very likely, from what follows in the ninth verse, that *as yet they knew not the scriptures, that he must rise again from the dead.* That is, they had not considered, or did not understand, the necessity of the Messiah's resurrection, and so never recollected that either their Master must have been false in all his pretensions of that kind, or he must have revived again, and left the grave according to the time and manner they saw it now done in.

As no truth, then, is of more importance to the Christian religion, so none had greater care taken than this to strengthen the belief of it. The testimony of angels, of disciples, of women, of numbers of people; the conversation of forty days, the testimony of the elements themselves; the earth trembling and quaking as if in pangs and travail to discharge this new birth, the testimony of others, whose bodies appeared in the holy city^e; nay the testimony of the most inveterate enemies of Christ. For even the Jews themselves, by advancing so incredible a story as that of his disciples stealing him away, do in effect confess and corroborate a truth which they so very weakly endeavour to destroy.

Among so great variety of proofs, I shall confine myself to those within the compass of this Gospel. And here what I shall observe to you will come under these two heads—

First, the circumstances in which these disciples found the sepulchre.

Secondly, their great slowness in apprehending and believing our Lord's resurrection. These two observations make up the substance of this scripture; and it shall be my business to shew that both these

things contributed very much to the proof of this article of our faith—that Christ did really rise again from the dead.

First, the circumstances in which the disciples found the sepulchre were a very considerable proof of the reality of Christ's resurrection, and the strongest confutation imaginable of that frivolous pretence put about by the chief priests, of the disciples stealing him away. Their unnecessary caution was most happily made an occasion of rendering that unquestionable which they designed especially to prevent, viz. the opinion of Christ's rising the third day. For (as we yesterday were told) to this end they procure a guard of the governor to watch the cave, and contrive that the stone rolled to close up the door of it should be sealed with his own signet. But when they found all this impertinent care of theirs had no effect, and the soldiers ran frightened away with the earthquake and vision of angels, and related what had happened, then they bribed them with large gifts, and promises of security and pardon, to spread abroad a report that his disciples had surprised the grave while the keepers were asleep, and, having privately conveyed away the body, gave out that he had made his words good in rising again the third day. A most unhappy pretence; and such an one as seems to carry a present infatuation of mind along with it. For who that thinks at all would suffer himself to be deceived by a lie that plainly discovers its own falsehood, and is so far from being true, that it is not possible it should be so? For, as St. Augustine in a just indignation expostulates the case with the soldiers: *Ye wicked, corrupt, senseless wretches; either ye were awake or asleep: if awake, it was your business to secure the body from being stolen away; if asleep, then your own words disprove you; for, granting this, it was impossible you should either know what was done, or who the persons were that did it.* So ill a contriver is even the father of lies himself as sometimes to detect himself; and to serve no other end but only branding the believer with the scandal of easiness or perverseness of temper, and covering the relator with shame. And sure the truth never shines so bright as when the oppositions that strive to darken it are plainly seen through, and under an evident necessity of being false.

That Romans, whose military discipline was so exceeding strict, should neglect their post upon so extraordinary an emergency, and when such particular zeal and diligence had been used, is as extravagant an imagination as a man could ever think of, except that other, of his disciples stealing him away. For are not these the very men that, upon the first assault in the garden, all forsook him and fled? They durst not stand by him even then, when he declared it in his power to call for *twelve legions of angels* to his rescue; and have they now the confidence to come in a body and bear away his corpse? They had but two swords among them all before; and he who had the courage to use one of them durst not afterwards so much as own any

knowledge of or dependence on his Master. And is the case now changed so monstrously, that these poor, naked, dispirited creatures should attempt a detachment of armed men, whose order and business was to expect and be provided for them? Is this a likely thing, that they, who durst not so much as appear in public, but assembled themselves privately, and shut up their doors, for fear of the Jews, should invade a strong guard? that they should all on a sudden grow valiant, or rather indeed foolhardy, to this degree? when he in whom they trusted was dead, when the stoutest of them all, even while he was yet alive, trembled at the voice of a silly servant, and did the most cowardly action in the world, that of affirming, nay, swearing to a falsehood, to deliver himself from the danger of an inquisitive and busy tongue? These are difficulties never to be got over, and such as will not suffer any man, that considers them, to believe that idle pretence which the Jews so industriously reported, to disprove our Saviour's resurrection.

But let us for once suppose (what yet is most improbable) that the disciples had courage enough for so desperate an undertaking; yet robberies we know are committed in haste and hurry, and every moment is tedious to men under confusion and fear of discovery. If therefore the removing of the body had been their work, and they had snatched an opportunity for it while the sentinels slept, would they not have taken it away as it was, without staying to unbind and undress it? Do thieves, after they have rifled a house, use to spend time in putting things in order again? And is it not agreeable to all the reason in the world, that these persons would have been rather solicitous to make their escape than to strip the corpse, to fold up the clothes, and to lay them apart from one another in their proper places? That which renders this still more and more unconceivable is the custom of interment in that country. Which, therefore, St. John does not forget to mention particularly; as being in truth a fit preparation and proper strengthening to the account he gives here. For in the thirty-ninth and fortieth verses of the foregoing chapter he acquaints us that *Nicodemus brought a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about a hundred pound weight; and they took the body of Jesus and wound it in linen clothes with the spices, as the manner of the Jews is to bury.* Now these spices were used to preserve the body from corruption, which they did by being a sort of shell or crust over it. And this their glutinous substance qualified them for. But the same gluey nature must needs make the clothes they were used with cling very close and fast to the skin, and not to be drawn off without a great deal of time and difficulty. When therefore these coverings were found, regularly pulled off, wrapped up, and laid by, this plainly shews the removing of Jesus's body to be a work of leisure, and much deliberation; such as by no means agrees with the confusion and haste of things done by stealth. Nor can it enter into any sober man's thoughts that they, who come privily, and in danger of their lives, should so far venture the awaking of the guard, and trifle away their time in these so hazardous, so unnecessary niceties. So that, had the

Lord been taken away, we cannot but think they would have taken him as he was, which would have served their turn very well. But since the sepulchre was found empty, and the grave-clothes left behind, we have great reason to conclude that he took himself away. And by the same Divine power which brought him into the world of a mother still a virgin, that he raised his own dead body to life a second time, without breaking the seal or removing the stone^h. For this we are expressly told was not his but the angel's doing; and done, not to make him passage, but to make the access to the tomb easy, and give opportunity for discovering this wonderful work of God. These objections, I say, lie against the Jews' fiction, that the disciples had stolen their Lord; and Mary's fear, that some other had conveyed him away. And if Peter and John had attended to what they saw, their own eyes and their own reason might have convinced them that this was Jesus his own doing, how marvellous soever it might seem to them at that time. But even in this, too, there was a particular providence; for their very slowness in apprehending and believing the resurrection of Christ did itself contribute much to the persuading men, and proving the reality of it. Which was the second thing I proposed to shew, and now proceed to prove it accordingly, upon these two accounts:

First, that backwardness of believing in the disciples added to the evidences given of this resurrection, and ministered occasion for several most undeniable proofs, which otherwise had not been necessary to them. And indeed their backwardness was so great, that one would wonder how they should be so exceeding stupid and heavy, had not God in his wisdom so ordered the matter, that their incredulity should be our confirmation. The certainty of a resurrection in general our Lord had oftentimes foretold; and that *all who were in the graves should one day hear his voice, and come forth*ⁱ. The necessity of his own resurrection, and the stated time of it, he had expressly declared; and when he gave them warning at any time of his approaching death, he never failed to support them withal by an assurance that he would rise again the third day. Notwithstanding all which warnings, the women, who returned from the sepulchre, and related their vision of angels, though persons of known integrity, were yet but indifferently received. Their words (says St. Luke) *seemed to them as idle tales, and they believed them not*^k. The greatest use that was made of it seems to be the putting Peter and John here upon examining matters more strictly. And yet even they do not appear to have made all those conclusions from the posture they found things in, as have been shewn fairly and naturally to be gathered from it. After this he appeared in person to Mary Magdalene, as the following part of this chapter acquaints us: but with what success, as to the disciples, St. Mark tells us, ch. xvi. 10, 11, for she *went and told them that had been with him, as they mourned and wept*. But they, when they heard that he was alive, and had been seen of her, *believed her not*. The same day two of them went to a village in the country, and he ap-

^h Matt. xxviii.ⁱ John v. 29.^k Luke xxiv. 11.

peared to them; walked with them, discoursed them largely, expounded the Old Testament prophecies concerning himself, and still their eyes and their understandings were blinded, *that they could not see him*. But by breaking of bread the discovery was made at last, and great haste was made to carry back these joyful tidings to the rest of their company. But when *they went and told it to the residue, neither believed they them*, says St. Mark^l. After this, he resolves to give them ocular demonstration, and shews himself to the eleven, upbraided them with their unbelief, that they gave no credit to others who had seen him before. But now they were so far from trusting others, that they durst not trust even their own eyes. *They were terrified and affrighted, supposing that they had seen a spirit*^m. To deliver them from this fear, he commands them to handle him, and so convince themselves that he had flesh and bones, and was no airy substance or empty apparition. Still they were more amazed than convinced; and therefore, to remove all scruple, *while they yet believed not for joy and wondered, he called for meat, and took it, and did eat before them*. This, one would think, should give satisfaction to the most sceptical doubters. But Thomas, who happened not to be there at that time, would not be content even so. He required a farther confirmation yet, which was the marks and woundsⁿ made by his crucifixion. And to this likewise Jesus condescends. For, at another visit to the disciples, he caused Thomas to thrust his hand into his side which the spear had pierced, and his fingers into the print of the nails that fastened him to the cross; and so gained the acknowledgment of this so very cautious person too. Again, to make all complete that could be any way necessary, he likewise appeared another time at the sea-side, and there made himself known to them by commanding a wonderful draught of fishes^o. Thus his Divine wisdom saw it expedient (as we express it in one of our collects) to suffer them to doubt, for the more confirmation of the faith. And he managed those doubts so that no circumstance should be wanting at last to prove his resurrection. And though he let them into those proofs by degrees, as they were fit for them, and able to bear them; yet he did it so artificially and prudently too, that every fresh instance confirmed and added something to those that went before. The empty sepulchre confirmed the women's report; Christ's appearance to Mary Magdalene shewed he was alive; that to the disciples at Emmaus proved that it was at least the spirit of Christ, by expounding the prophecies, and breaking of bread; that to the eleven shewed the reality of his body; that conviction given Thomas proved it the selfsame body that had been crucified; and that miracle of the fishes argued the same Divine nature still united to the same body. So that, though here be many evidences, yet none of them are superfluous. Every one hath something new, and peculiarly its own; and all together are a demonstration so full and satisfactory of the same Christ, the same God and man in one person, returned from the dead, that we have great reason to praise

^l Mark xvi. 13.^m Luke xxiv. 37.ⁿ John xx. 24, 30.^o John xxi.

God for suffering the disciples to doubt so much and so long; since by their *not believing but because they had seen*, there is the greater security given to us, *who have not seen, and yet have believed*. For,

Secondly, this contributed likewise to the satisfying others in the truth of our Lord's resurrection, as it took away all those prejudices that might rise, and usually do rise, upon the first reporters taking up things too hastily. These disciples were to be (as they style themselves) the witnesses of our Lord's resurrection. And therefore it was of great concern to the world, upon what convictions they embraced a truth which others, who could not be eyewitnesses of it, were to rest upon their testimony for. The apostles, we know, were plain men, and constant followers of our Lord; so that both their ability and their honesty might be called in question upon this occasion. The simplicity of their life and conversation, though it might free them from the suspicion of deceiving others, yet could not give any assurance that they were not deceived themselves. And we know men are often exceeding positive in things that afterwards prove to be false, and might have been detected sooner if they had had either the judgment or the patience to examine them strictly. Especially too, if there be any interest concerned in the case, how great a step towards the believing a thing true is the wishing that it were so! And what ease could lie more open to this suspicion than that now before us? Upon Christ's rising or not rising from the dead, would depend the authority of his doctrine, and all his miracles. Himself had referred the whole issue to this last, this important sign; that, as *Jonas was three days and three nights in the whale's belly, so the Son of man should be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth* ^P. So that all his reputation, and all theirs too, depended upon it. And therefore both the love of their Master, and a tenderness for themselves, might reasonably be thought to bias them in this particular, and to make the passage for such an opinion much more easy and open to their minds. But now, when, instead of all this, they seemed rather stupid and insensible, inasmuch that our Saviour reproaches them with *folly and slowness of understanding*, nay with *infidelity and hardness of heart* ^Q: when they were so far from inclining to the belief of it, as to be rather obstinately bent against it, and stood out against all the impressions of this kind, with a sort of resolute perverseness: when they would neither credit one another nor their own selves; but cavilled at every fresh instance, and raised new scruples and new difficulties perpetually; and yet, when afterwards these very men were so firmly persuaded of this, that they staked down their lives in vindication of it: these must needs be considerations of mighty weight to establish their credit. For these free them from all imputation of casiness and partiality: and we cannot in reason have any thing to say against such witnesses; nor attribute their confidence at last to any other cause than the powerful evidence of truth upon their own consciences. They proceeded so warily, and so far renounced their own interest, as to doubt every

circumstance, and resolve not to believe till there was no pretence left for the doubting any longer. They received nothing till it had been most critically inquired into: and they stood out against those reports of credible men and of their own senses, which, if any consideration of interest could have swayed them, they would have reconciled themselves to the very first moment. And more than this we cannot have, more we cannot ask, in any witness, than judgment and care and integrity; and all these attested to by the seal of the Holy Ghost, the gift of miracles from heaven. So that, upon all accounts, the delays and doubtings of the apostles were of mighty advantage to this doctrine of the resurrection. They gave occasion for more convincing and sensible proofs of it to themselves; and they rendered them more competent and credible attestors of it to others.

These are considerations exceeding proper for this solemnity, to satisfy every Christian what a firm foundation his faith stands upon, and to put all its enemies to confusion. But unless we do something more than argue for our Saviour's resurrection, it had been the same thing to us if he had never risen at all. The Second Lesson for this Morning Service, and the Epistle for the day, tell us largely what use is to be made of this article. That owning and being baptized into the belief of it implies our being conformed to the likeness of what our Saviour hath done. That we must rise with him; and prove that we do so by *setting our affections on things above; that, as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we also should walk in newness of life; that as he died to sin once, and now liveth unto God, so we should reckon ourselves dead unto sin, but alive unto God; alive like him over whom the law of sin and death hath no more dominion, and who returned not a second time to corruption*^r. Remember, then, that Christ is risen, but that they only will have comfort of his rising who are thus risen with him. The great revolution of the whole world, its second and better creation to immortality, began this day. But if we have no part in it by reformation and a new life, we are of all men most miserable. Our Prince and King hath *overcome indeed the sharpness of death: but it is to believers only that he hath opened the kingdom of heaven*. And such believers are only they who prove their faith by their works. And to those he hath given a sure comfort, such a one as *neither tribulation, nor distress, nor even death itself, can rob them of*. For since their Redeemer liveth, they are certain that, *though after their skin worms destroy this body, yet there will come another day when in their flesh they shall see God*. Whom God grant us to behold and to see for ourselves, that is, for our own unspeakable and everlasting happiness, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

^r Rom. vi. 4, 9, 10, 11.

EASTER MONDAY.

FOR THE EPISTLE. Acts x. 34.

34 *Then Peter opened his mouth, and said, Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons :*

35 *But in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him.*

36 *The word which God sent unto the children of Israel, preaching peace by Jesus Christ : (he is Lord of all :)*

37 *That word, I say, ye know, which was published throughout all Judæa, and began from Galilee, after the baptism which John preached ;*

38 *How God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Ghost and with power : who went about doing good, and healing all that were oppressed of the devil ; for God was with him.*

39 *And we are witnesses of all things which he did both in the land of the Jews, and in Jerusalem ; whom they slew and hanged on a tree :*

40 *Whom God raised up the third day, and shewed him openly ;*

41 *Not to all the people, but unto witnesses chosen before of God, even to us, who did eat and drink with him after he rose from the dead.*

42 *And he commanded us to preach unto the people, and to testify that it is he which was ordained of God to be the Judge of quick and dead.*

43 *To him give all the prophets witness, that through his name whosoever believeth in him shall receive remission of sins.*

THE GOSPEL. St. Luke xxiv. 13.

13 *And, behold, two of his disciples went that same day to a village called Emmaus, which was from Jerusalem about threescore furlongs.*

14 *And they talked together of all these things which had happened.*

15 *And it came to pass, that, while they communed together and reasoned, Jesus himself drew near, and went with them.*

16 *But their eyes were holden that they should not know him.*

17 *And he said unto them, What manner of communications are these that ye have one to another, as ye walk, and are sad ?*

18 *And the one of them, whose name was Cleophas, answering said unto him, Art thou only a stranger in Jerusalem, and hast not known the things which are come to pass there in these days ?*

19 *And he said unto them, What things ? And they said unto him, Concerning Jesus of Nazareth, which was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people :*

20 *And how the chief priests and our rulers delivered him to be condemned to death, and have crucified him.*

21 *But we trusted that it had been he which should have redeemed Israel : and beside all this, to day is the third day since these things were done.*

22 *Yea, and certain women also of our company made us astonished, which were early at the sepulchre ;*

23 And when they found not his body, they came, saying, that they had also seen a vision of angels, which said that he was alive.

24 And certain of them which were with us went to the sepulchre, and found it even so as the women had said: but him they saw not.

25 Then he said unto them, O fools and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken:

26 Ought not Christ to have suffered these things, and to enter into his glory?

27 And beginning at Moses and all the prophets, he expounded unto them in all the scriptures, the things concerning himself.

28 And they drew nigh unto the village, whither they went: and he made as though he would have gone further.

29 But they constrained him, saying, Abide with us: for it is toward evening, and the day is far spent. And he went in to tarry with them.

30 And it came to pass, as he sat at meat with them, he took bread, and blessed it, and brake, and gave to them.

31 And their eyes were opened, and they knew him; and he vanished out of their sight.

32 And they said one to another, Did not our heart burn within us, while he talked with us by the way, and while he opened to us the scriptures?

33 And they rose up the same hour, and returned to Jerusalem, and found the eleven gathered together, and them that were with them,

34 Saying, The Lord is risen indeed, and hath appeared to Simon.

35 And they told what things were done in the way, and how he was known of them in breaking of bread.

COMMENT.

The proofs of our blessed Lord's resurrection are twofold; consisting partly of matter of fact, and partly of the agreement of that fact with ancient prophecies concerning so very important an event. Of the former sort I have treated already; and have there taken in the historical part of the Epistles and Gospels for this and the following day^a. Which indeed do chiefly seem to turn upon the latter evidence; and therefore my discourses upon them shall be confined to that, and cast into one continued argument upon it. To this purpose we shall do well to observe, that when, by several demonstrations of his being really alive, our Lord had rendered his disciples fit to hear reason, he put them in mind that the events which they looked upon as altogether incredible were no other than he, in his former conversation with them, had very frequently assured them should be brought to pass; that they were in every point agreeable to the prophecies delivered many ages before. Those prophecies which the Jews unanimously allowed to be intended of the Messiah, and such as now they had seen exactly accomplished in him, were an irrefragable argument that he was that very Messiah. Upon this he enlarges; and by the explanation of those scriptures which related to himself, as well

^a Gospel for Easter day.

as by the inward assistances and illuminations of his grace, darted new light into their understandings, and shewed them the correspondence and exact harmony of those predictions with the things which they could witness had happened to him. The stress whereof lies in those two passages, which, from the mention of those former prophecies, draws this inference; *Ought not Christ to suffer and to enter into his glory^b?* and again, *Thus it is written, and thus it behoved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day^c.*

Those clauses, *Thus it is written, and thus it behoved*, may probably mean no more than this; that Christ must needs suffer and rise again, because the scriptures concerning him could not otherwise have been true. And then the argument is but one; that after God had declared such things concerning the Messiah, and made these the marks which the world was to distinguish him by, however strange and surprising they might appear at first, yet, upon maturer consideration, it was easy for men to satisfy themselves that they were unavoidably necessary for vindicating the truth of God, who had so long before given warning of them by the prophets.

But in truth this necessity was subordinate to another. For these things were therefore foretold, because God had from all eternity determined them^d. And they were determined, because his infinite wisdom saw the fitness of them, and their subserviency to the great ends of sending the Messiah for the redemption of mankind. Therefore that expression, *thus it behoved*, if it do not require, yet it may admit of another sense, which makes it an argument somewhat different from the former. And that is, that the death and resurrection of Jesus were in all points suitable to the character of the Messiah; and, that the scheme and design of man's redemption could not have been so properly satisfied by any other means as by these.

This, I say, if it be not the most natural and necessary, is yet a very useful construction of that expression. But I shall not take the liberty of treating of it in this latitude. And therefore, limiting myself to the former sense, what I have to say upon this subject will consist only of two heads:

I. First, I shall instance in some of the most material passages which it is reasonable for us to suppose our Lord insisted upon; and,

II. Secondly, I shall show wherein the force of his argument lay, in applying these as remedies to the perplexities and doubts of his disciples at that time.

1. First, I shall instance in some of the most material passages which it is reasonable to suppose our Lord made use of in the present case. He is said to have *begun with Moses and all the prophets, and to have expounded in all the scriptures the things concerning himself^e*. Now, though it is possible he might open to them the predictions relating to other matters and actions of his life, yet the main difficulties then lying before them, and the only things mentioned here, being his passion and resurrection, I shall confine my discourse to

^b Ver. 26, 27.

^c Ver. 44—46.

^d See the Gospel on Quinquagesima Sunday.

^e Ver. 27.

such as foretell these only. Nor shall I enlarge any farther upon them than to produce such, at least the principal of such, as we find expressly applied to this purpose in the New Testament. For since the evangelist hath not told us particularly what prophecies our Lord insisted upon to convince them at this time, I cannot think it unreasonable to presume, that the disciples endeavoured to convince others by the same scriptures to which they owed their own conviction. And therefore such as we find them either relating, as quoted by our Lord before his death, or else urging upon the Jews in their own persons afterwards; such, I think, we may fairly presume had a place in our Lord's discourse, designed to settle their minds and remove their doubts and compose their astonishment occasioned by his death and resurrection.

I only add, before I enter upon particulars, that there are two sorts of things by which future events were signified under the Old Testament. The one consisted in words, the other in facts; and these are therefore distinguished by predictions and types. For what the prophets did was in some cases reputed of equal significance and authority with what they spoke; both being allowed to proceed from the impulse and direction of the same Divine Spirit, and upon that account to be as full of mystery, and to challenge the same regard. And accordingly we shall find both appealed to, with respect to the matter now before us. In handling which I shall consider each apart, and shew, in this discourse, what intimation was given by both that Christ must suffer; and in my next, that he must rise again from the dead the third day.

As to the sufferings and death of Christ, the prophecies produced in scripture are very many, and so copious and express, as to reach every material circumstance relating to them. That he should be betrayed by a particular friend, one that was sustained by his bounty and retained to him, David hath foretold in the 41st psalm, which Jesus applies to himself, John xiii. 18, 19, *I speak not of you all, I know whom I have chosen; but that the scripture may be fulfilled, He that eateth bread with me hath lift up his heel against me. Now I tell you before it come, that when it is come to pass, ye may believe that I am he.* And again, Matth. xxvi. 23, 24, to the disciples' question, who it was that should betray him, he answered and said, *He that dippeth his hand with me in the dish, the same shall betray me. The Son of man goeth as it is written of him, but woe to that man by whom the Son of man is betrayed.*

St. Peter, in the first of the Acts, is express, that some of those imprecations in the 69th and 109th psalms had Judas's transgression and the falling from his apostleship in view; to which likewise our Saviour is probably thought to allude, when he says, *Those whom thou gavest me have I kept, and none of them is lost, but the son of perdition, that the scripture might be fulfilled.* The potter's field being bought with the thirty pieces of silver, and his being sold for so vile a price,

is by St. Matthew referred to an old prophecy: ^a *Then was fulfilled that which was spoken, They took the thirty pieces of silver, the price of him that was valued, whom they of the children of Israel did value, (or, as it is in the Old Testament, 'a goodly price that he was valued at by them,) and gave them for the potter's field, as the Lord appointed me.*

The fears and confusion of his disciples are by our Lord himself declared to be an accomplishment of another passage in the same prophet, Matthew xxvi. 31, ^k *Then saith Jesus unto them, All ye shall be offended because of me this night: for it is written, I will smite the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock shall be scattered abroad.*

The infamous manner of his death, and the profligate companions of his sufferings, St. Mark observes to fall in exactly with the description given of it by Isaiah many ages before; ^l *With him they crucified two thieves, the one on his right hand, and the other on his left: and the scripture was fulfilled, which saith, And he was numbered among the transgressors.*

David, describing the barbarity of his enemies, says, *They parted his garments among them, and upon his vesture did they cast lots.* But St. John informs us that those words had a much more distant prospect: and how strangely the avarice of the soldiers, and the particular form of Jesus his clothes, concurred to give them their due and ultimate completion! John xix. 23, 24, *Then the soldiers, when they had crucified Jesus, took his garments, and made four parts, to every soldier a part; and also his coat. Now the coat was without seam, woven from the top throughout. They said therefore among themselves, Let us not rend it, but cast lots for it, whose it shall be: that the scripture might be fulfilled, which saith, They parted my raiment among them, and for my vesture they did cast lots. These things therefore the soldiers did.*

Our Lord in his dying agonies made use of the very words of David in the 22d psalm, *My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?* In which psalm that tragical scene is painted to the life, and the very taunts of his reviling enemies are repeated; as if it were a melancholy poem, describing a death already past, rather than a prediction of one to come above a thousand years after. And lastly, just before our Lord expired, he cried, *I thirst.* But this was done that the scripture might be fulfilled, (says St. John, chap. xix. 28.) For the same David, psalm lxxix. 22, complains thus, *They gave me gall to eat, and when I was thirsty, they gave me vinegar to drink.* Now this was never strictly and literally true except in the case of this Son of David, for to him *they ran, and filled a sponge, and gave him vinegar to drink mingled with gall.*

Once more; that impertinent malice of the Roman soldier, who wounded his body with a spear, was another circumstance too, corresponding with an ancient prophecy, in which this very act was fulfilled, in those words quoted by St. John from Zechariah, ^m *They shall look on me whom they have pierced.*

The foundation of the church's conversion was laid in a text of

^a Matth. xxvii. 9, 10.

^k Zach. xi. 12, 14.

^l Zach. xiii. 7.

^l Compare Luke xxii. 37.

^m John xix. 27; Zach. xii. 10.

Isaiah ; and Philip could not begin at any more apposite scripture to bring him over to Jesus than that which Providence ordered that he should just then be reading ; *"He was led as a sheep to the slaughter, and like a lamb dumb before his shearers, so opened he not his mouth. In his humiliation his judgment was taken away ; and who shall declare his generation ? for his life is taken from the earth.*

Now as in these last words that prophet foretold the meekness and invincible patience of the blessed Jesus under so injurious a death, so did he likewise the great charity and main design of it, and how a person so innocent, so divine, came to endure so bitter things ; that this was a dispensation of God for the benefit of sinful man, to lay on him the burden of the punishment of those transgressions, which must otherwise have sunk the guilty committers into irrecoverable misery and destruction. For if we look into the 5th and 6th verses of that famous 53d of Isaiah, we shall find, that St. Peter does but take the prophet's words into his own mouth when he gives this account of Christ, in the second of his first Epistle at the 24th ; *Who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sin, should live unto righteousness : by whose stripes ye were healed. For ye were as sheep going astray. So the apostle. Now observe the prophet eight hundred years before : Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows. He was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities : the chastisement of our peace was upon him, and with his stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray : we have turned every one to his own way ; and the Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all.*

These, I think, may more than suffice for verbal predictions of our Lord's passion ; I shall instance in two or three of the other sort, figures and types, taken notice of in the New Testament ; and they are these :

The first I shall mention is the paschal lamb, appointed to be slain, and the blood of it sprinkled upon the doors of every Israelite, in the night when God slew all the firstborn in Egypt. And the use of this was to secure the inhabitants, where this blood was sprinkled, from all the dire effects of the destroying angel. Now the like benefit accrues to Christians by the blood of Jesus. St. John calls him *the Lamb of God that takes away the sins of the world*, and says, *He hath washed us in his own blood.* St. Paul, that *we are reconciled to God by his blood.* And that *Christ our passover is sacrificed for us.* And St. John once more takes notice, that *when the soldiers came to take down the malefactors from the cross, they brake the legs of the two thieves crucified with Jesus. But when they came to him, and saw that he was dead already, they brake not his legs.* Which he attributes to a very particular providence, for *these things were done*, says he, *that the scripture should be fulfilled, A bone of him shall not be broken.* It seems then that scripture had not been fulfilled if any bone of Jesus had been broken. But that scripture is one of the precepts concerning the passover in the twelfth of Exodus, and was constantly observed by the Jews in their celebration of it. Since therefore this scripture required and found its full

ⁿ Isaiah liii. ^o John i. 29. ^p Rev. i. 5. ^q 2 Cor. v. 18. ^r 1 Cor. v. 7. ^s John xix. 32, 33, 36.

and last completion in Christ, some account there must be of the concern he had in it. And this can be no other than the mutual relation between the Jewish lamb and him; that as the shadow, him as the substance: and consequently, he is the true, the universal passover, that turns away the wrath of God, and by the merit of his sacrifice delivers them that have part in him from the destruction of the reprobate and wicked.

Another image of Christ was the sin-offering instituted by the Jewish law, which (I have proved already), as upon other occasions, so especially upon the great day of atonement, was to reconcile them to God. And the manner of it was (it hath been said) to bring the blood into the sanctuary and sprinkle it before the Lord, but to burn the body without the camp. With allusion to this, Christ is not only called *our peace*, and said to be *made sin for us*: but more particularly the same ceremonies are observed to be nicely regarded in the place and manner of his death. For thus the author to the Hebrews argues: *The bodies of those beasts, whose blood is brought into the sanctuary for sin, are burnt without the camp. Wherefore Jesus also, that he might sanctify the people with his own blood, suffered without the gate.*

One more remarkable type there is denoting both the kind and the efficacy of this death. When the Israelites in the wilderness were stung with fiery serpents, Moses was commanded to set a brazen serpent, resembling those in form, on high upon a pole; and as many as looked upon this were healed of their plague. Our Lord in like manner, though made in the likeness of sinful flesh, yet knew no sin himself; as that brazen serpent had the resemblance only, but none of the fire and venom, of those serpents whose sting it was ordained to cure. Nor did the fixing it in view effect a recovery by any natural and necessary operation; but the benefit of healing was confined to them that fixed their eyes upon it, and, consequent to that, *turned themselves to this sign of salvation*, (as the Wisdom of Solomon expresses it,) which made them capable of the mercy of God working in and by that emblem. Thus is the death of Christ effectual for curing the sins of men; not of all indifferently and without distinction, but of such as qualify themselves by faith. All which cannot be more fully illustrated than by that passage in our Lord's discourse with Nicodemus, (John iii. 14, 15.) *As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up; that whosoever believeth on him should not perish, but have eternal life.* And that there is a peculiar propriety in that phrase of being *lifted up*, with regard to the crucifixion of our blessed Saviour, the same evangelist hath instructed us (ch. xii. 32, 33.), who, upon the occasion of those words, *And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me*, adds, by way of explanation to this term, *This said Jesus, signifying what death he should die.* Let this suffice for proof that thus it was written, and thus it behoved Christ to suffer. That there was the same necessity, and upon the same account, for his rising again, shall be the subject of to-morrow's meditations.

FOR THE EPISTLE. Acts xiii. 26.

26 Men and brethren, children of the stock of Abraham, and whosoever among you feareth God, to you is the word of this salvation sent.

27 For they that dwell at Jerusalem, and their rulers, because they knew him not, nor yet the voices of the prophets which are read every sabbath day, they have fulfilled them in condemning him.

28 And though they found no cause of death in him, yet desired they Pilate that he should be slain.

29 And when they had fulfilled all that was written of him, they took him down from the tree, and laid him in a sepulchre.

30 But God raised him from the dead :

31 And he was seen many days of them which came up with him from Galilee to Jerusalem, who are his witnesses unto the people.

32 And we declare unto you glad tidings, how that the promise which was made unto the fathers,

33 God hath fulfilled the same unto us their children, in that he hath raised up Jesus again ; as it is also written in the second psalm, Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee.

34 And as concerning that he raised him up from the dead, now no more to return to corruption, he said on this wise, I will give you the sure mercies of David.

35 Wherefore he saith also in another psalm, Thou shalt not suffer thine holy one to see corruption.

36 For David, after he had served his own generation by the will of God, fell on sleep, and was laid unto his fathers, and saw corruption :

37 But he, whom God raised again, saw no corruption.

38 Be it known unto you therefore, men and brethren, that through this man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins :

39 And by him all that believe are justified from all things, from which ye could not be justified by the law of Moses.

40 Beware therefore, lest that come upon you, which is spoken of in the prophets ;

41 Behold, ye despisers, and wonder, and perish : for I work a work in your days, a work which ye shall in no wise believe, though a man declare it unto you.

THE GOSPEL. St. Luke xxiv. 36.

36 Jesus himself stood in the midst of them, and saith unto them, Peace be unto you.

37 But they were terrified and affrighted, and supposed that they had seen a spirit.

38 And he said unto them, Why are ye troubled ? and why do thoughts arise in your hearts ?

39 Behold my hands and my feet, that it is I myself : handle me, and see ; for a spirit hath not flesh and bones, as ye see me have.

40 And when he had thus spoken, he shewed them his hands and his feet.

- 41 *And while they yet believed not for joy, and wondered, he said unto them, Have ye here any meat?*
- 42 *And they gave him a piece of a broiled fish, and of an honeycomb.*
- 43 *And he took it, and did eat before them.*
- 44 *And he said unto them, These are the words which I spake unto you, while I was yet with you, that all things must be fulfilled, which were written in the law of Moses, and in the prophets, and in the psalms, concerning me.*
- 45 *Then opened he their understanding, that they might understand the scriptures.*
- 46 *And said unto them, Thus it is written, and thus it behoved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day:*
- 47 *And that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem.*
- 48 *And ye are witnesses of these things.*

COMMENT.

I now proceed, according to my proposal yesterday, to consider the predictions and types of our blessed Redeemer's resurrection. And that both as to the thing in general, and as to the particular time of it. For the scriptures before us now extend to both, that he *should rise from the dead*, and that he should rise the third day.

Almighty God had promised to Abraham, *that in his seed all nations of the earth should be blessed*^a: this seed, St. Paul affirms to the Galatians, is Christ, who redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us, that the blessing of Abraham might come upon the Gentiles through Jesus Christ. And St. Peter acquaints the Jews that this promise was made good to them in our Lord's resurrection, (Acts iii. 25, 26.) *Ye are the children of the prophets, and of the covenant which God made with our fathers, saying unto Abraham, And in thy seed shall all the kindreds of the earth be blessed. Unto you first God, having raised up his Son Jesus, sent him to bless you, in turning away every one of you from his iniquities.*

David in the second psalm, magnifying the mercy of God in his Son's exaltation to the throne, had said, *I will declare the decree, The Lord hath said unto me, Thou art my son, this day have I begotten thee.* And St. Paul, making the Epistle for this day his sermon in the synagogue at Antioch, contends for this as the true sense of these words: ^b*We declare unto you glad tidings, says he, how that the promise, which was made unto the fathers, God hath fulfilled the same unto us their children, in that he hath raised up Jesus again; as it is also written in the second psalm, Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee.* And that this psalm had a peculiar reference to the Messiah, we learn from the allusion made to it by the whole college of the apostles in the fourth chapter of the same book.

^a Gen. xii. 3; Gal. iii. 13, 14, 16.

^b Acts xiii. 32, 33.

The same royal prophet in another place is carried out into raptures of trust and holy hope, which could not with propriety of speech belong to any but Christ, and therefore in his person we are to understand those words, *Thou wilt not leave my soul in hell, neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption*^c. The application whereof to the matter now in hand St. Peter vindicates thus in his sermon on the day of Pentecost, *Men and brethren, let me freely speak unto you of the patriarch David, that he is both dead and buried, and his sepulchre is with us unto this day. Therefore being a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him, that of the fruit of his loins, according to the flesh, he would raise up Christ to sit on his throne; he seeing this before spake of the resurrection of Christ, that his soul was not left in hell, neither his flesh did see corruption.* And St. Paul in like manner here to the Jews at Antioch, *David, after he had served his own generation by the will of God, fell on sleep—and saw corruption: but he, whom God raised again, saw no corruption.*

But in our Saviour's resurrection there was one particular privilege, which distinguished him from any other person miraculously brought to life again: it is, that they only were called back, and, as it were, reprieved for a certain term of time, but still continued subject to mortality; and when that period was expired, returned to their dark prisons of the grave, there to remain confined till the general gaol-delivery at the great assizes of the whole world. But Christ, as St. Paul observes, *being raised from the dead, dieth no more; death hath no more dominion over him*^c. And this peculiar exception that apostle observes to have been punctually foretold by Isaiah: *And as concerning that God raised him up from the dead, now no more to return to corruption, he said on this wise, I will give you the sure mercies of David*^f.

Now by these *sure mercies of David* are meant those blessings for which Almighty God had engaged his truth, and of the full attainment whereof David so often expresses his entire confidence. Particularly that of an everlasting kingdom, to be continued to his posterity. Which having manifestly failed in the first and temporal sense, it follows that this promise must have a second and more sublime sense belonging to it. Such as imports a spiritual and eternal kingdom: the same which Isaiah foresaw in his ninth chapter; and which the holy angel at our Saviour's incarnation declared should be vested in the wonderful Son of that virgin mother. *He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest. And the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David: and he shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever, and of his kingdom there shall be no end.* This investiture the apostles declare to have commenced from his resurrection: *The God of our fathers, say they to the Jewish sanhedrim, hath raised up Jesus, whom ye slew and hanged on a tree: him hath God exalted with his right hand to be a Prince and a Saviour.* Now from hence it follows that he could not rise to die a second time, because such death must put a period to his reign; and, consequently, that kingdom not being over-

^c Acts ii. 29, 30, 31.^d Acts xiii. 36, 37.^e Rom. vi. 9.^f Isaiah lv. 3; Acts xiii. 34.^g Luke i. 32, 33; Isaiah ix. 7.^h Acts v. 30, 31.

lasting, these mercies of David were not sure; that is, the promise would not be made good in the just extent and most valuable sense of it.

As to the particular time of our Lord's resurrection, though some passages in the prophets are very justly interpreted of it, yet because I find no express application of them by the writers of the New Testament, I shall content myself with that one type produced by Christ himself to the Jews, which at once prefigured both the thing and this circumstance of it. And this was so remarkable, that our Lord refers that obstinate people hither, as to the last and most awakening miracle which God reserved for their conviction, and would hold them inexcusable upon whom it should have no effect: *h As Jonas was three days and three nights in the whale's belly: so shall the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth. The men of Nineveh shall rise in judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it: because they repented at the preaching of Jonas; and, behold, a greater than Jonas is here.*

Thus have I laid before you some of the principal prophecies and types by which God signified long before that the Messiah should suffer, and rise again from the dead, such as, we may probably conjecture, our Lord expounded in his conferences with the disciples; because we find them insisted upon afterwards in their reasonings with the Jews. It were very easy to enlarge yet more by producing others of the same kind, with reference to the other parts of our Lord's exaltation, and the administration of his spiritual kingdom. But I confine myself to these two subjects of his death and resurrection, as proper to this season. I shall now descend briefly to the second branch of my division upon it, which is,

2. To shew wherein the strength of this argument, drawn from such predictions and prefigurations, consists; and upon what account it was proper for bringing over these disciples to a belief of Jesus therefore being the Christ, because he did actually thus suffer, and thus rise again from the dead.

Now in order hereunto we must observe,

1. First, that the persons to whom our Lord directed this discourse had been all along bred up in the knowledge and practice of the Jewish religion, and received the writings of the Old Testament as the oracles of God, and the rule and standard of their faithⁱ. Now the greater their skill in these things was, the more firm their persuasion would be of a Messias to come. One who should fulfil all the glorious things spoken of him there, and was to be known and distinguished from all false pretenders by doing so. For of the Christ those words of Moses are to be understood, and were constantly understood by the ancient Jews: *k A prophet shall the Lord your God raise up unto you of your brethren like unto me; him shall ye hear. And it shall come to pass, that every soul that hearkeneth not unto that prophet shall be cut off from his people.* Since, then, their obedience to this

^h Matt. xii. 40, 41.

ⁱ See Gospel on Quinquagesima Sunday.

^k Deut. xviii.; Acts iii.

great Prophet was enjoined under so severe a penalty, it must needs be that God left them not utterly in the dark in this most important affair; but gave them some particular marks and characters by which they might be able to discern that Prophet to whom such obedience was due.

2. Secondly, it is likewise observable that the Jews acknowledged and understood these signs of the Messiah as incommunicable to any other. Hence is that saying, *When Christ cometh, will he do more miracles than these which this man hath done?* Hence the appeal our Lord makes to his miracles, in order to satisfy that question of John's disciples, *Art thou he which should come, or do we look for another?* The plain meaning whereof is, both that one famous person was expected, entitled by way of eminence *he that should come*; and also, that the greatness and number and quality of his miracles were a sufficient token to point and single him out when he did come. So that our Lord's argument (as I have formerly observed) lies thus: He who does those many and mighty wonders foretold by the prophets is he that should come. Your own senses are judges whether I have done these wonders or no. And therefore, if your senses convince you that I have wrought such things, there cannot remain any reasonable doubt but that I am he that should come.

3. Thirdly, allowing some such characters to be laid down concerning the Messiah, it will follow that, if any of these prophecies were in some sense fulfilled in any of the eminent men of old, yet there was still another and sublimer sense, peculiar to the Messiah, which till it was fulfilled in him, the utmost intent of those prophecies was not satisfied. And this is the method taken by the apostles, particularly by St. Peter and St. Paul, in their discourses upon our Lord's resurrection, to prove that the passages of David and Isaiah were not fully made good in the persons that spoke them, or in their letter and most immediate signification: consequently that, supposing a double sense, and them to have any part in them, they had another person in view, who should give them their utmost accomplishment. And till that were done, the truth of God, who dictated those expressions, had not discharged itself. That there were many predictions relating to the Messiah, is a principle confessed by the Jews. Either, therefore, the Messiah was never prophesied of nor prefigured at all by such, which the Jews will not all agree in; or else some prophecies and prefigurations contained in the Old Testament will require, and do contain, a future and mystical, in the opinion of them who admit a present and stricter interpretation. And if so, then that person in whom that highest and ultimate construction is accomplished ought to be received as the promised Messiah. And that this was a method of expounding the Old Testament received among the Jews seems probable from hence; that when our Lord and his apostles made use of it, the enemies of the gospel are never said to have objected against it as an unfair way of arguing. The evasions of this nature being only such miserable shifts as the Jews of later ages have taken sanctuary in. Who, to cover their incorruptible unbelief, have thrown off

those texts which heretofore were universally acknowledged to point at the Christ. So that,

4. Fourthly, the whole turns at last upon the veracity of Almighty God, the Divine authority of the prophetic writings, and the agreement of what happened to our Jesus with those remarkable things foretold of the Messiah. If God be true, whatever he hath declared shall be must certainly come to pass. If the prophets wrote as they were inspired and directed by the Holy Ghost, whatever they have laid down concerning the Messiah must needs be accomplished in his person. But the prophets did declare that the Messiah should be cut off from the land of the living; that he should die under such and such circumstances; that, after he was thus dead, he should rise again. The Person, therefore, who in all points made good these predictions is undoubtedly the Christ. Now Jesus did thus die, and thus rise again; no other person besides himself ever did so; and consequently Jesus, and no other person, is the Christ of God. Since therefore these disciples confessed that such things were dictated by God himself, and foretold of the Messiah; and since they saw them punctually made good in their own Master, his sufferings and death ought not to discourage or weaken their faith, because these were necessary to the character and office of Christ. And had he not so suffered and died, he could not possibly have been the Christ. But in regard the same person so described heretofore to suffer and die was likewise foretold to rise again the third day; the demonstrations he had now given them, upon that very day from his death, of his being actually risen, were an irrefragable evidence that all the glorious benefits which the world was to expect from the promised Messiah were to be depended upon from, and would most assuredly be found in, Jesus. So that they might boldly witness these things to the world, and preach *repentance and remission of sins in his name*; in his, I say, who died for the sins of mankind, and *rose again for their justification*.

To whom with the Father and Holy Spirit be all honour and glory for evermore. Amen.

A

PARAPHRASE AND COMMENT

UPON

THE EPISTLES AND GOSPELS

APPOINTED TO BE USED IN

THE CHURCH OF ENGLAND

ON ALL

SUNDAYS AND HOLIDAYS THROUGHOUT THE YEAR.

BY GEORGE STANHOPE, D. D.

SOMETIME DEAN OF CANTERBURY.

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A

PARAPHRASE AND COMMENT

UPON ALL THE

EPISTLES AND GOSPELS

USED THROUGHOUT THE YEAR.

THE FIRST SUNDAY AFTER EASTER.

THE COLLECT.

ALMIGHTY FATHER, who hast given thine only Son to die for our sins, and to ^a rise again for our justification; Grant us so to put away ^b the leaven of malice and wickedness, that we may alway serve thee in pureness of living and truth, through the merits of the same thy Son Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

THE EPISTLE. 1 St. John v. 4.

4 *For whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world: and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith.* 4. Every true child of God gets above the affections and temptations of this world, in the strength of that faith which gives him full assurance of, and sets his heart upon, another and better world.

5 *Who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God?* 5. Of which assurance the belief that Jesus is the Son of God, and so the author of eternal salvation, is the ground.

6 *This is he that came by water and blood, even Jesus Christ; not by water only, but by water and blood. And it is the Spirit that beareth witness, because the Spirit is truth.* 6. For this belief we have the strongest evidence, the innocence of his life, the merits of his death, the testimony of God at his bap-

^a Rom. iv. 25.^b 1 Cor. v. 7, 8.

tism, the miracles at his crucifixion, the signs and wonders done by him and by others in his name, by the power of the Holy Ghost, the Spirit of truth.

7 *For there are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost: and these three are one.* 7. Thus we have three witnesses in heaven, who, (though three persons, are one in nature, and so) cannot disagree.

8 *And there are three that bear witness in earth, the spirit, and the water, and the blood: and these three agree in one.* 8. We have likewise three on earth, which (though differing in nature, yet) agree in the matter of their testimony.

9. *If we receive the witness of men, the witness of God is greater: for this is the witness of God which he hath testified of his Son.* 9. If then three fallible men are depended upon, when concurring in their evidence, shall we not much

more rely on the evidence of an infallible God?

10 *He that believeth on the Son of God hath the witness in himself: he that believeth not God hath made him a liar; because he believeth not the record that God gave of his Son.* 10. This is a principle which, when received, fills a man with perfect satisfaction in the truth of it; but when rejected, is a constructive giving of God the lie, as declaring his testimony not worthy to be believed.

11 *And this is the record, that God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son.* 11. The substance of which testimony is, that God hath provided an eternity of happiness for good men, to be attained in and by his Son.

12 *He that hath the Son hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life,* 12. So that our title to that happiness is good or void according as we have or have not faith and interest in that Son of his.

COMMENT.

THE great and glorious things our blessed Saviour hath done for mankind are not intended to excuse his followers from action, but to enable them for it, and render them successful in it. Therefore, from the contemplation of that conquest which by his death and resurrection he hath already won, the church very fitly and naturally leads us, in the Epistle for this day, to that which every disciple of Jesus is expected to aspire after and to gain in his own person. The world is one of those enemies against which every Christian engages solemnly and formally at the instant of taking that profession upon himself in baptism. And our entering into this covenant, the new relations we contract there, the new life we then begin and engage to lead, and the communications of God's Holy Spirit, received in that sacrament, to strengthen and enable us to persevere in the faithful discharge of those engagements, do in effect make up our second and spiritual birth. So that the persons *born of God* are baptized and faithful

Christians; and the scripture now in hand does not only imply the necessity such lie under of fighting and conquering, by saying that *whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world*, but it acquaints us what weapon is put into their hands for that purpose, by adding, *and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith*.

In order to make due profit of this passage, I shall from hence take occasion to inquire, first, what we are to understand by *the world*; secondly, what by *overcoming* it; and thirdly, what is the nature of that *faith* by virtue whereof this *victory* is obtained.

I. I begin with the first of these; which it is absolutely necessary to get a right apprehension of. For till we know the adversary with whom we are bound to contend, we cannot possibly understand either the nature of that war we are required to wage, or the duty of waging it, or when we have approved ourselves good soldiers in it.

By *the world* we are sometimes to understand *the persons*, and sometimes *the things* in it. But that neither the one nor the other of these can be meant here in their utmost latitude is plain from the reason of the thing, and from the manner of St. John's using this word. Now both these represent the world to us as a dangerous enemy; such as cannot be loved with innocence and safety, but must be forsaken and opposed with all our might; such as, if yielded to, made truce with, and received into our friendship, sets us at enmity with God, and betrays us into certain ruin.

But now, *the persons in the world* we are under manifold obligations to love and live friendly with. Their common relation to God, their mutual alliance to each other, the laws of nature, and those of the Christian religion, all conspire in demanding it of us. *The things of the world* are also such as he who created and best understood them hath approved, and declared to be *very good*. They are contrived for our use and service; they minister not only to the necessities but to the comforts and conveniences of the present life. They are such as we have natural appetites and inclinations to, and are allowed, by all honest methods and in convenient measures, to seek for our subsistence and better accommodation. But in regard, through the degeneracy of human nature, our affections are apt to exceed their proper bounds, and an inordinate love both of the persons and things of the world becomes the occasion of much (in a manner, of all) sin to us; hence it is that the world is represented as our *enemy*; hence, that we all do solemnly renounce it in our baptism; hence, that our Saviour is said to *save* his disciples *from* and to *choose them out of it*; hence, that we are commanded not to *love it*; hence, lastly, that the word throughout the New Testament is generally used in a very bad sense, and that in each of the respects already mentioned, as it concerns both *the persons* and *the things* of the world.

In all these, and in sundry passages of like importance, we are plainly to understand by *the world* that which St. Paul hath, with particular distinction and significance, called the *evil world*. With regard to *persons*, the *world* that lies in *wickedness*; those that are

^c Gen. i. 31.

^d James iv. 1.

^e Gal. i. 4.

^f John xv. 19.

^g John xi. 15.

^h Gal. i. 4.

ⁱ John v. 19.

called *the children of this world*, and are so opposite to them of another race and family, who my text tells us *are born of God*. The *world*, then, in this acceptation, denotes the naughty men in it, the corrupt principles, and dishonest practices, and sinful customs and fashions, which such people proceed upon and indulge themselves in, and are industrious to propagate and bring into credit and general vogue. And with regard to *the things* of the world, the pomps and the vanities, the honours and riches and pleasures that minister to pride and excess, and all manner of sin and folly; that engage our desires and endeavours in the pursuit of them as of our proper happiness; and, by fastening down our affections to this earth and its enjoyments, leave us none, or but little relish of, zeal for, or delight in, those spiritual and distant and infinitely better things which God hath provided in another world for them that love him; and which our blessed Saviour hath commanded every Christian first and principally to love and seek. And because the persons who misbehave themselves in these respects are exceeding numerous; as well as because the principle they act by is that complacency in the present state of things which the Scriptures have condemned under the character of a *sensual* and *worldly* mind; therefore, by an usual figure of speech, denominating the whole from the much greater part, those *persons* and those *things* are called *the world*.

Let this suffice for the discovery of our enemy, and what St. John here means by *the world*. Our next care must be to inquire, in the

II. Second place, what it is to *overcome the world*, and who they are that do so. Now, by what went before, I take it to be sufficiently plain, that, in order to overcome the world, as that word imports the wicked *persons* in it, we must not be carried away with the torrent of any faction though never so strong, nor *follow a multitude*, though never so great and powerful, *to do evil*: we must not suffer any relations or friendships, though never so intimate and dear, to engage us; any dependencies and interests, though never so advantageous, to allure us; any threats, or fears, or displeasures, to awe and affright us; any the subtlest persuasions to seduce us; any examples, though never so prevailing and authoritative, to draw us; any practice, though never so general and common, to ensnare us, in even the most specious, the most profitable, the most fashionable sin. We must refuse the least compliance beyond the rules of our duty and the dictates of our conscience. This is, in our Saviour's language and meaning, *not to love father or mother more than him*, but to hate even our dearest relations, for the zeal we have to become his disciples. Nay, not this only, but we must be content with the jests and scoffs, the censures and reproaches, of preciseness, singularity, or whatever else men of profligate manners and debauched principles endeavour to laugh or to rail those persons out of their religion by, who refuse to run into the same excess of riot with themselves. We must not content ourselves with a private and solitary piety, but employ the best of our skill and diligence, our credit and power (as Christian prudence shall direct, and

¹ Luke xvi. 8.

² Matt. vi. 13.

³ Exod. xxiii. 2.

⁴ Matt. x. 37.

as our respective stations and capacities admit), to inform the ignorant and mistaken, to settle the weak and wavering, to encourage and strengthen the timorous, to reduce and rescue the miserable wretches, (for surely they are of all wretches most miserable,) whom fear or partiality or interest, or any of those weaknesses which the Scripture implies under the phrases of *respecting* or *being afraid of the face of men*, have enslaved to the temptations of Satan, and the will of his instruments, for promoting wickedness in the world. In one word, they who, by their advice and endeavours, their constancy and courage, their reproofs (where those may be seasonable), and especially by their good example (which can never be unseasonable), do not only secure their own virtue, but propagate it in other people, these are true subjects of the kingdom of grace. And none but these answer the character of overcoming the world; so far as that word imports here the corrupt customs, the reigning principles, the general ill influence, of the unbelieving and debauched part of the world; and the many and the great patrons and ringleaders of both that abound in it.

This for *the persons*: then for *the things of the world*. Methinks it is of itself so very plain as not to need any proof, that, in order to overcome the world in this sense, the least that can possibly be needful is, that none of its pleasures or advantages be suffered so far to bear sway over our affections as for their sakes to draw us into sin. For these (it should always be remembered) are the very baits which the tempter casts before us in order to our destruction; and their agreeableness and convenience to the present state of human nature are the very causes of our danger with regard to them. Without them we cannot live, but we must not make them the end of living, by placing our happiness in them. The desires of them cannot be either avoided or totally extinguished; and yet if we give a loose to those desires, and let them run out beyond their bounds and measures, we are undone. Therefore the true mastery to be aimed at in this point is to seek and to use and to value them, to rejoice in the possession, or to be afflicted for the loss of them, in their proper place and time and degree. And what is proper in these cases, though so very few seem to be truly sensible, yet it would be no hard matter to understand, were men disposed to judge impartially in the case, and did they but set themselves in good earnest to consider the nature of the things and the purposes they were intended to serve.

Concerning the nature of all worldly advantages¹, enough hath been said heretofore to show, that if it were lawful for us to make them the ultimate object of our desires, yet are they not capable of answering those desires; but all must end at last in emptiness and disappointment, and sad regret for our own folly. Almighty God indeed hath suited his laws to the condition of his creatures. He hath commanded us to love the things about us in such proportion as does not cause, but most effectually prevent our unhappiness; by making our necessities and their usefulness the true standard of our concern for them. He hath appointed these as means to bring about a far more precious

¹ Septuagesima Sunday Epistle.

end ; but that is such an end, and these such means, that neither the possession nor the privation of them is absolutely necessary ; but the one or the other may be instrumental in bringing it about. For virtue and piety here, and heaven and complete holiness hereafter, are the things we ought to aim at. And these may be attained by the contentedness and patience of the poor, or by the moderation and liberality of the rich ; by the resignation of the afflicted, or sick, or in pain, or under disgrace, as well as by the thankful obedience of the prosperous, or healthful, or easy, or honourable. From whence it plainly follows that the things of the world are not themselves any part of our real happiness ; that they contribute no farther to it than as they become occasions of exercising the virtues, and putting our minds in the frame and temper proper for the circumstances of life we then are in. And he who considers and is convinced of this, if he will act consistently, cannot desire or love them for their own sakes, but purely as instruments and helps to virtue. Consequently he cannot desire them with any great impatience, nor love them with any immoderate tenderness ; because, though they be comforts and encouragements, yet are they not essential to that which he loves and desires most, and in order whereunto alone it is that he desires and loves these things at all. So that to receive and improve every dispensation of Divine Providence in such manner as shall advance our virtue, to have that principally in view, and to manage not only all events so dexterously, but even all our passions with so masterly a hand, as to continue steady to our main point, and make all turn to a good account there ; this I take to be *overcoming the world* in the second sense of that word, as it imports *the things* of the world.

And if all this be necessary to the conquest every Christian is bound to make, then how few, alas ! how very few are the men who approve themselves conquerors indeed ! How many are there in truth so far from waging this war successfully, that they never hardly engage in it at all ! The ambitious, the covetous, and the voluptuous man are so far from triumphing over, that they are perfectly led into captivity, and live in direct slavery to the enemy they have solemnly listed themselves against. For they who prefer their pleasure to their duty, or are content to sacrifice their souls to any worldly interest, how great and valuable soever, do manifestly prefer the means to the end, take that for their happiness which at best can be but an instrument and help to it ; nay, they quite pervert the use these things were intended for, and turn that into an instrument of ruin and misery which was designed to facilitate and promote their happiness. Intended as subservient to, but never to be, nor in its own nature possible to be, the true and ultimate end of their actions. This is the case of them who would submit to do wickedly, even upon the highest considerations ; and then how vile and wretched is their slavery who are satisfied to drudge on in a course of sin and injustice, whose very business is wickedness and the world, and that upon so very poor profits, as the generality of people, in the way of trade and dealings with one another, are satisfied to sell their consciences for every day they live !

But even when we are arrived so far as not to consent to any

wickedness upon the account of worldly advantages, this will not suffice to gain the victory mentioned here as a mark of our spiritual regeneration. For that supposes such a mastery over our passions, even with regard to things that are in their own nature innocent, as shall make the world sit loose about us, reconcile us to every disposal of Providence, preserve an evenness and resignation of mind, and be content to part with any or all our comforts here below, when God sees fit to command them from us or us from them. In short, no man who clings so close to any of these conveniences as to be immoderately exalted with prosperity, or broke with afflictions; as not to love his God and Saviour better than every thing else; as not to distribute of his abundance cheerfully; not to delight in doing good with his talent more than in hoarding it up, to be better pleased with his devotions than his diversions, with the improvement of his virtue rather than that of his estate; who would not choose to be the least in the kingdom of heaven rather than the greatest monarch upon earth; he, I say, who hath not wrought his mind up to this noble and generous frame, though not a slave like those men of sin we described before, is yet but in a state of combat, the success of which is still doubtful; but far short of that truly Christian heroic bravery which hath actually overcome the world. He in effect is no better than one of those *double-minded* men reproved by St. James, whose distorted affections have one mind for the Creator and another for the creatures; who are borne down sometimes with the evidence of religion and the testimony of their own consciences, and at other times again by the weight of some worldly consideration, and the violence of their own passions. These, as he says, are *"tossed like a wave of the sea, unstable in all their ways"*; over floating between two; they ebb and flow, grow better or worse men, gain or lose ground in this spiritual encounter, just as the one or the other of these principles happens at that time to be uppermost. Whereas the true conquerors of the world are distinguishable by nothing more than a constant and uniform manner of temper and behaviour; such as must needs proceed from the loving of God *with all the heart, and with all the mind, and with all the soul, and with all the strength*. For by this love alone it is that we can be victorious; a love that bears no rival, that values nothing in comparison, much less admits any thing into competition, with him; and, consequently, maintains an absolute dominion over all below. For nothing here below will ever be able to control or disturb us, except when suffered, either to shut God out from our hearts, or to divide them with him. If the former be our case, we have hired ourselves out to a wrong, a tyrannical, a merciless and unprofitable master; if the latter, we are parted between two masters, and do in effect serve neither: in both cases we are slaves, and otherwise we cannot be till entirely devoted to and continually employed in that dear Lord's service which is *perfect freedom*.

But are any of us in good earnest sufficient for such a conquest? Can a nature mortal and frail, liable to our necessities, born with our

appetites, bred up in the daily experience and sensibly convinced of the comforts and conveniences of life arising from thence, so abstract himself from this world and the things of it, that they should no longer retain any place in his affections and concern?

This is the objection commonly brought against our arguments which would persuade men to get above the world, and to assert that liberty that reason and religion are intended to secure to them. An objection countenanced indeed by a preposterous way found out by some for overcoming the world, which is, to go so far out of it as to have no more to do with its cares and concerns. But retiring into vows and cloisters is rather a quitting the field than a winning of the battle. Be sure it cannot be the conquest meant in the text which all the regenerate are expected to make. This must be general, but the practice last mentioned neither can nor ought to be so.

But the answer is plain and easy. That the most active life is capable of this conquest; that no such desires or love of earthly things are unfit, as serve the necessities of nature, the true use of the creatures, or the innocent enjoyments and conveniences of life; that for the rest, though human powers alone are not of force to subdue our inclinations, yet there is a principle capable of doing it, which every man may be armed with, which every Christian pretends and is presumed to have, and they who have it and use it will continue impregnable to all the rude assaults or treacherous allurements of this enemy. For warring against whom successfully St. John hath here directed us to the only effectual expedient, by adding, *this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith.*

III. By *the victory* is to be understood the means or instrument of obtaining it; and by *our faith* is intended the belief of the Christian religion as it is delivered down to us in the gospel, and summarily contained at ver. 5 in this one article, that *Jesus is the Son of God.* Hereby are implied a firm assent to the truth of his doctrines, a steadfast reliance upon the merit of his sufferings, and an assured expectation of his glorious promises. Doctrines, which a person Divine could not have taught had they not been true; sufferings, which because undergone by a person Divine cannot but be of infinite worth and efficacy; promises, which a person Divine can and will make good to the uttermost. And therefore, to men whose minds are possessed with this belief, the difficulty of overcoming the world is more than balanced by that absolute certainty of a future reward, and by the excellence of that reward. A reward incomparably, unconceivably beyond any happiness this world can give. A reward peculiar to them who are content to despise and reject the present less, in prospect of the distant greater bliss; which this Son of God hath pledged his truth most solemnly for, nay, hath already invested human nature in, by exalting our flesh to the right hand of the majesty on high.

So that, upon a just stating of the whole matter, the point at last turns upon this; that we, in fighting against and overcoming the world, do not deny or contend with nature, but only the corruptions of nature. We reduce and restrain our desires of things agreeable here, but we choose to do it as an expedient to get into our possession

things infinitely more agreeable hereafter. It is true, the one sort are present, and the object of sense, which gives us a certainty of them; the other are future, but not less certain because they are the object of faith². For God can no more deceive us than even our own sight and experience can. Let it but be our care to have this spiritual shield always in readiness, to fix our minds in this belief, and be continually conversant with God and heaven, by pious meditations and acts of holy hope; and when our hearts are set upon their true treasure, the false ones here below will be so far from captivating our affections, that they will scarce be able to disquiet, or make a resistance of any consideration against us. In a word, faith is the very principle by which we attain to our second and better birth; the seed of that new life in us, which implies a new heart and new affections; a dying to the vanities and corruptions and inordinate desires of the world, and a love and likeness of God by which we resemble our Father, and by that resemblance prove ourselves his children. But of this resemblance one material part is such an indifference to the things of the world, as becomes them who look upon themselves to be sojourners only here, but have their hope and home, their relations and friends, their dwelling and inheritance, in another and better country.

In virtue of this faith it was that difficulties and dangers, scourgings and imprisonments, tortures and death have been encountered, endured, defeated, triumphed over by that glorious and invincible army of prophets, apostles, and martyrs who have fought this good fight, and approved themselves more than conquerors in it. And what should hinder us from being equally successful? Their passions and infirmities were the same; our arms and assistances are the same. Human nature and the Christian religion continue unchangeable in every age of the church: they conquered not through their own strength, but through him *that loved them*; and he *that loved them* loves us; and, provided we be careful not to degenerate from such principles and such examples, will be equally ready to sustain us in our combat, and to recompense us for it and after it with the same crown of life and righteousness.

THE FIRST SUNDAY AFTER EASTER.

THE GOSPEL. St. John xx. 19.

19 *Then the same day at evening, being the first day of the week, when the doors were shut where the disciples were assembled for fear of the Jews, came Jesus and stood in the midst, and saith unto them, Peace be unto you.*
 an angel afterwards did those of St. Peter's prison, Acts xii.) to come to them, and saluted them.

19. The evening of that day, the disciples keeping close for fear, our Lord found means (probably by opening the doors of the room miraculously, as an

² See Epistle 4th Sunday in Advent and 6th after Epiphany.

20 *And when he had so said, he shewed unto them his hands and his side. Then were the disciples glad, when they saw the Lord.*

person, and his real human body which they saw. Compare Luke xxiv. 37—40.

21 *Then said Jesus to them again, Peace be unto you : as my Father hath sent me, even so send I you.*

them the same commission (so far as their office and circumstances required) to teach and govern his church, which he had hitherto executed in his own person.

22 *And when he had said this, he breathed on them, and saith unto them, Receive ye the Holy Ghost :*

to them, he did not only command them to receive the Holy Ghost, but did it with the ceremony of breathing on them, to shew that the gift and the Spirit that empowered them was his.

23 *Whosoever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them ; and whosoever sins ye retain, they are retained.*

this office, as to the keeping in or shutting out from the sacraments and privilege of his church by reason of such sins as made persons unworthy of them, or as to admitting men in and restoring to this communion upon faith and repentance, should be ratified in heaven, and have the same effect there with regard to the eternal state of such men, as their proceedings had here for their communion with his church on earth.

COMMENT.

THE demonstration which our Lord vouchsafed here to give of the reality of his resurrection^o hath been already considered, among many others of that kind. I only add on this occasion, that the manner of coming in to the disciples, mentioned in the paraphrase, seems most agreeable to his design of convincing them that the body they then saw was the same that had died on the cross. Opening the doors by his almighty power left all the proofs for this in their full force ; but the penetrating those doors supposed to remain shut is an operation so inconsistent with the nature of a human body that it must in reason have added to the confusion of the disciples, confirmed their supposition of seeing a spirit, and would be as strong an objection against our Lord's having flesh and bones at that time as either their seeing or their handling could be for it.

My design at present is to insist upon the nature of that commission granted to the apostles in the Gospel for this day. The rather, because the due extent of it, though perfectly understood, no doubt, by the apostles themselves, hath yet been, either through ignorance or

20. To take off their surprise and fright at this unexpected visit, he convinced them that it was his very person. Compare Luke

21. When they were composed he repeated his former salutation ; and gave

22. And to shew the fullness of that authority by which he delegated the power

23. Adding withal a declaration that whatever they did in the due execution of

subtlety, so variously enlarged or restrained in succeeding ages, as to become the unhappy occasion of great disputes and lamentable divisions in the Christian church. Into these controversies it is no part of my purpose to enter: choosing rather to consider the importance of those words, *As my Father hath sent me, even so send I you*, in such a meaning as they plainly and naturally bear; and such as, one would think, every sober and unprejudiced Christian must needs acknowledge in them. And that is threefold,

I. Sending upon the same design.

II. Sending with an authority so far the same as was necessary to compass that design.

III. Sending with the same assurances of love and protection and gracious assistance.

I. By *sending* the apostles as his *Father had sent him*, it cannot, I think, be questioned, but that our Lord meant sending them upon the same design that himself came about, which he often expresses by *doing the work, and seeking the honour, of him that sent him*. Now these are but other terms for propagating and establishing the kingdom of the Messiah, by the belief and obedience of his blessed gospel. One part indeed of this design there was, and one of the most essential and necessary parts of it, peculiar to Christ alone; the dying for the sins of the world; which he only was sufficient to take away, and so to save *them to the uttermost who come to God by him*. To save all, provided all come: but the directing men how they must come, and assisting those that do come, this was to be done by these persons and their successors. And in this they might, and it is expected they should be serviceable, by wise and holy instructions, by seasonable reproofs, by pious and shining examples, by opposing all dangerous delusions and errors, by showing their people the good and the right way, by going before them in that way; and by doing all this with a zeal so indefatigable, with a resolution so sincere, with a courage so unshaken, as, if their duty call them to it, even to lay down their own lives, after their great Master's example, for the testimony of the truth.

This is the design they were appointed to promote—the salvation of souls. For this end the Father sent his divine Son; for the same end that Son sent his apostles; and not them only, but as many as should succeed them, so long as that ministry should continue to be needful; that is, so long as there were any souls to be taught and to be saved. A mighty and difficult work, a rich, an inestimable treasure, that such are intrusted with. The consideration whereof ought, much more than sad experience shews it usually does, prevail with all Christians to pray most heartily, to pray incessantly, for a blessing upon the labours of these men; and, by their own kind acceptance of and ready concurrence with their good advice, to ease the burden and contribute to the efficacy and success of an authority intended for their people's edification, and not for their destruction. Which leads me to

II. A second thing meant by Christ's *sending these apostles as his Father had sent him*; that is, with a power and authority like that

which his Father had given him. Himself is styled in Scripture the *Minister of the circumcision*, *the Apostle and High-priest of our profession*, *the Shepherd and Bishop of our souls*, and *that great and good Shepherd of the sheep*. And those disciples and their successors have likewise the honour to be distinguished by the titles of *ministers, apostles, bishops and pastors of the flock, kings and priests to God and the Father, ambassadors of Christ, and in his stead, and fellow-workers together with him*. Now in communicating these denominations, the Holy Ghost must in all reason be supposed to impart the same authority intended by them. Only with this difference, that Jesus is the High Priest, the rest subordinate to him: he, the great and the chief Shepherd, whose own the flock is; they, deputed by him, accountable for their trust to him, and depending upon a reward for their faithful discharge of that trust from him. Now the exercise of this authority so nearly resembling his must needs, I should conceive, extend to the three following instances at least:

1. A power of ordering and making such laws and constitutions as shall from time to time be found necessary for the good government of the people committed to their care. In the essential parts of religion they are bound up indeed, and cannot go beyond the word of their great Lawgiver to say less or more. Here all they have to do is to explain, illustrate, or, in terms more express, to declare the sense of Scripture, whose passages are dark and ambiguous, and wrested to wrong purposes. And thus far even our blessed Lord himself declares his own commission to have been limited also; *"I have not spoken of myself, but the Father which sent me, he gave me commandment what I should say, and what I should speak. And I know that his commandment is life everlasting: whatsoever I speak therefore, even as the Father said unto me, so I speak."* As for points of belief then and general practice, their business is to hold fast *"the form of sound words, not to depart from the holy commandment, and earnestly to contend for that faith which was once (once for all) delivered to the saints."* But in matters which are circumstantial only, and in their own nature variable, they are left at large to prescribe what shall seem most expedient for order and peace and union, and the beauty of religion. Provided always that herein they act nothing disagreeable to the superior laws of Christ. This is a right so plain from the very nature of the thing, that one would wonder at the perverseness of denying it. For in regard the church is a formed and standing society, how can we imagine it left destitute of a power without which no society can subsist and distinguish itself? And such a power is that of making by-laws and constitutions peculiar to that body, to which every member who partakes of its privileges is bound to submit; and of contriving such prudent provisions for the ordering its own proper affairs, as any extraordinary emergencies and the difference of times and places and circumstances shall render advisable and convenient.

2. Another instance of this power and authority committed to

P Rom. xv. 8. 4 Heb. iii. 1. 7 1 Pet. ii. 25. 8 Heb. xiii. 20. 9 Eph. iii. 7; Phil. i. 1;
 1 Tim. iii. 1; Eph. iv. 11; Rev. i. 6; 2 Cor. v. 20; 2 Cor. vi. 1. 10 John xii. 49, 50;
 11 2 Tim. i. 13. 12 2 Pet. ii. 21. 13 Jude, ver. 3.

those whom Christ hath sent as his Father sent him, is, admitting into communion, punishing the offences of those in it, casting out the incorrigible, receiving satisfaction from the penitent, and upon such repentance releasing the penalty and guilt. Here lies the true exercise of those censures, and those absolutions of the church, which our Lord elsewhere calls *the keys of the kingdom of heaven*. With how good reason, what follows both here and there sufficiently declares. Because they who bear them by our Lord's commission, and open and shut with them agreeably to his will and direction, shall find all their regular proceedings ratified in the court above. For this is intended by those last words of this Gospel, *Whose soever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them: and whose soever sins ye retain, they are retained*. So that these sentences are not so properly the person's pronouncing, as they are Christ's in his mouth; not his act, but a declaration of God's act, and an intimation what will by him be irreversibly fixed in the last great day of account. So deplorably lost are all those unthinking and impenitent wretches, who either wilfully cut off themselves, or, by their incurable obstinacy, constrain their governors to cut them off from this mystical body of Christ.

3. The last instance of this authority which I shall mention at present is, that of appointing their successors, and choosing proper persons to administer in the sacred offices of the church. Without such a succession, how should religion be kept up? Therefore the same reason which moved Christ to delegate his apostles for a supply to his absence, stands equally good for their delegating others for a supply to their mortality. This we find to have been the practice of the apostles themselves; and we may easily see by what hands it was done. They were Timothy and Titus to whom St. Paul gives rules and characters for bishops and deacons. Of the former it is said that he received the gift that was in him by the *"laying on of the hands of the presbytery"*. And to prevent any false consequences that so doubtful a word might countenance, the same is said to be in him by *"the putting on of St. Paul's own hands"*. To this person thus qualified St. Paul commits the cure of the church of Ephesus; as he did that of Crete to Titus, with this particular article in his commission, that he *should set in order the things that were wanting, and ordain elders in every city*.

And these two instances last named are of equal necessity with the former to the well-being of any society. For every such incorporation must have a coercive power within itself for calling to account such offences as may be detrimental to the body, and for determining conditions for enjoying the privileges peculiar to it, and what breach of such conditions shall abate or suspend, or totally forfeit and exclude from such privileges. Nor is it less essential to the order of any society that its offices and administrations be not left open and in common; but that, to prevent usurpation and confusion, overseers and directors be regularly chosen and constituted; and that they have solemn marks impressed, to distinguish them from the rest of the members, and preserve the regard due to their character.

It should always be remembered, upon this occasion, that the au-

thority intrusted by Christ with his apostles, and by them delivered down to posterity, is of a spiritual nature. Thus much is implied in the form of giving it, *Receive ye the Holy Ghost*. Thus much by our Lord's declaration elsewhere, that *his kingdom is not of this world*. For the making whereof good he hath ordered and constituted the whole frame of it so, that the kingdoms that are of this world have nothing to fear from thence. For Christ hath secured his own territories, by making this power wholly distinct from the temporal, as to the substance, end, and object of it; and he hath secured the temporal from invasion, by leaving the spiritual subject to that, as to the public exercise and limitations of its jurisdiction. Those, therefore, who from hence take occasion to domineer over princes and usurp the civil sword, become guilty of what the apostles blame elsewhere, by *using their liberty for a cloak of maliciousness*, and *serving, not the Lord Jesus, but their own belly*.

III. Thirdly, by Christ *sending* his apostles as his *Father sent him*, we are to understand his owning, asserting, protecting, and succeeding their labours and their persons, as his Father had done to him and his. Of this no reasonable question can be made by any who considers his discourse to those disciples in the fourteenth, fifteenth, and sixteenth chapters of this Gospel; the manner of his recommending them to God in the seventeenth, or the leave he took of them at his ascent^c into heaven. From hence results the firmest assurance that the constant peculiar providence of God shall attend them, that his grace shall assist them, that the marks of his favour shall follow them in the discharge of their duty. That they shall not want the pleasing comfort of seeing their pious endeavours prosper in their hands; or, if they do, that then their perseverance and patience shall be taken into the account; and the less joy they have here, the greater recompense shall be reserved for them hereafter. That shall be measure pressed down, shaken together, and running over, poured into their bosom. At which time also they will not fail to see the signal vengeance and eternal condemnation of those incorrigible creatures, who would not be persuaded by their advice, nor amended by their reproofs. And though this last be but a melancholy contemplation, and such as they would much rather wish there were no occasion for; yet it is such a method as the justice of God and the necessary vindication of truth require, that they who will not glorify God by their obedience shall do it, whether they will or not, by suffering most terribly for their disobedience.

It were therefore much the wisest way for men to *account of us as of the ministers of Christ, and stewards of the mysteries of God*: since he vouchsafes to esteem us so who hath promised to be *with us alway, even unto the end of the world*. And those that are serious and holy will over esteem us so. A profligate person or a profligate people is never more certainly distinguished than by giving themselves a liberty of vilifying their clergy; for it is not the men, but the employment that gives disgust; and religion itself is struck at through

^a John xviii. 36.

^a 1 Pet. ii. 16.

^b Rom. xvi. 18.

^c Matt. xxviii.

^d 1 Cor. iv. 1.

^e Matt. xxviii. 20.

the sides of those who administer its offices. This, I am aware, is a very tender point; and if we, with St. Paul, attempt to *magnify our office*, what he did out of conscience we shall be thought to do out of no very commendable principle. Since therefore we are looked upon too nearly interested to be well heard in a cause so much our own; let one speak for us who is above all exception, and who will be heard at our utmost peril. And to those who labour to render us and our profession odious and contemptible, the Holy Ghost applies himself, among others, in these two very remarkable passages; the one, that of our blessed Saviour: *‘He that heareth you heareth me, and he that despiseth you despiseth me, and he that despiseth me despiseth him that sent me.’* The other that of St. Paul: *‘He that despiseth, despiseth not man, but God, who also hath given us of his Spirit.’* The sum whereof is, that they who use the representatives of Christ ill would use their Master so too, if they had the same power and opportunities. How much better would it become men who call themselves Christians, to consider the importance and end of our *high calling*, and to *esteem us very highly in love for our work’s sake!* For an esteem, no doubt, there is due to the character and profession, which no personal defects in him that bears it can absolve wholly from paying. But even for these, and indeed for all the rest, it should be the constant and most fervent desire of every private Christian, that it would please God to *illuminate every bishop, priest, and deacon with true knowledge and understanding of his word, and that both by their preaching and living they may set it forth and show it accordingly.* Which may our good Lord grant for Jesus Christ his sake.

THE SECOND SUNDAY AFTER EASTER.

THE COLLECT.

ALMIGHTY God, who hast given thine only Son to be unto us *both a sacrifice for sin, and also an ensample of godly life*; Give us grace that we may always most thankfully receive that his inestimable benefit, and also daily endeavour ourselves to follow the blessed steps of his most holy life; through the same Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

THE EPISTLE. 1 Peter ii. 19.

19 *This is thankworthy, if a man for conscience toward God endure grief, suffering wrongfully.* 19. To suffer meekly and without blame, and to do this out of a sense of that resignation due to the will of God, is a virtue he kindly accepts, and will not fail to reward.

20 For what glory is it, if, when ye be buffeted for your faults, ye shall take it patiently? but if, when ye do well, and suffer for it, ye take it patiently, this is acceptable with God.

21 For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps:

may appear, is yet exactly agreeable to your profession. This supposes you followers of Christ, and never was there such a perfect pattern of this virtue. So perfect innocence, ver. 22. and so perfect patience, ver. 23.

22 Who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth:

23 Who, when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not; but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously:

24 Who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness: by whose stripes ye were healed.

25 For ye were as sheep going astray; but are now returned unto the Shepherd and Bishop of your souls.

he bore the penalty of we should mortify the power of; so exactly did he fulfil the prophecy of Isaiah in his liiird chapter, both as to the lost condition you formerly were in, and as to the method of recovering you out of it.

21. This suffering patiently, not only when ye do well, but even for doing well, as hard as it

24, 25. They were our sins, not his, that he died for; and he died in the quality of a sacrifice, to bear the punishment of and to make the atonement for them: that what

COMMENT.

THE Epistle for this day consists of two parts. The one an exhortation to patience, enforced by the example of our blessed Saviour; who in his death and passion, and the manner of sustaining them, hath left us a pattern of the brightest innocence most injuriously oppressed, and of the most invincible meekness and submission under that oppression. The other is a declaration of the end and design of that death, and in what quality he condescended to suffer. Which was in the nature of an expiatory sacrifice for the sins of others. The former of these hath been spoken to already, upon the Epistle for the Sunday before Easter. The latter was so largely explained in the comment on the Epistles for Wednesday before Easter, and Good Friday, that I cannot think it needful to detain my reader any longer upon either; but choose to refer him back to those discourses for any remarks, which might have otherwise been proper for this place.

THE SECOND SUNDAY AFTER EASTER.

THE GOSPEL. St. John x. 11.

11 *Jesus said, I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep.*
 Isaiah xl. and Ezekiel xxxiv. and xxxvii. And I approve myself to be so, by my care and affection for my flock, preferring their safety before my own life.

12 *But he that is an hireling, and not the shepherd, whose own the sheep are not, seeth the wolf coming, and leaveth the sheep, and fleeth: and the wolf catcheth them, and scattereth the sheep.*

13 *The hireling fleeth, because he is an hireling, and careth not for the sheep.*

14 *I am the good shepherd, and know my sheep, and am known of mine.*

15 *As the Father knoweth me, even so know I the Father: and I lay down my life for the sheep.*

16 *And other sheep I have, which are not of this fold: them also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice; and there shall be one fold, and one shepherd.*

thus of them and the Jews shall one universal church be constituted.

11. I am that eminent and spiritual shepherd foretold by the prophets. See And I approve myself to be

12, 13. So do not they, who have no farther aim than their own private ease and advantage in watching over the sheep.

14, 15. I approve and love and protect my sheep; they in return love and obey me. Which mutual regards bear some proportion to those between my Father and me.

16. But this flock I design to enlarge, and to take in the Gentiles also, who will receive and obey my doctrine. And

COMMENT.

THE Epistle concludes with giving to our blessed Saviour the title of *Shepherd and Bishop of our souls*. The Gospel does not only introduce that Saviour taking that denomination to himself, but giving a reason why it belonged to him in a manner so peculiar, that no other can presume to lay the like claim to it. The ground of this is laid in a degree of love so tender and so costly, as none besides ever came up or near to; no less than laying down his own life for the benefit and preservation of his flock, which otherwise must inevitably have fallen a prey to that ravening wolf, whose constant practice it is to hunt and devour poor defenceless souls. The greatness of this love, and the returns we are obliged to make for it, have been largely and frequently illustrated heretofore: particularly when treating upon those passages of scripture which represented to us our Lord's sufferings and death, upon the approach of Easter.

That which I would principally insist upon at this time is the character we are here described under. And in pursuance of this argument, I shall inquire, first, what sort of persons those are which

Christ here calls his sheep, and, secondly, wherefore he chooses to call them by that name.

1. The thing I chiefly aim at in the former of these inquiries is, what relation they bore to Christ, whether they were actual believers or not, whom he dignifies with that name.

A question this, which some interpreters have not thought it worth while to trouble themselves about; but to my apprehension of some moment, however, toward understanding the true importance and force of our Saviour's discourse upon this subject.

And here I must acknowledge an appearance of great weight in those arguments which have induced learned men to think that this title is not confined to them only who had made actual profession of the faith, and embraced his doctrine; but that, by way of anticipation at least, it extends to all such as were ready and in fit temper of mind to receive and submit to it as soon as it should sufficiently discover itself to them. What other construction can possibly agree with *those other sheep*, so named at the sixteenth verse, though not as yet brought into the fold! These doubtless are the Gentiles, who at that time were so far from making a part of Christ's church, as not to be competently instructed in the worship and confession of the one true God. And for the terms of salvation by the gospel, the method fixed for communicating these was, not to carry them to the world in common, till the Jews had not only enjoyed this inestimable privilege, but had incurred the guilt of despising and thrusting it away from them. All which considerations seem manifestly to apply the title of sheep to many who were not yet, as well as to those comparatively few who actually were, believers at the time of our Lord's discourse now before us. Which yet will, I conceive, be yet more confirmed by the next thing I shall speak to,

2. The reasons why our Lord should choose to call them by this name. Of which it shall suffice to take notice of these two. Now,

1. First, That this allusion was very proper and pertinent, in regard of the persons with whom our Saviour argued, the condition and customs of that country may convince us. For the greatest part of the wealth and improvement there consisted in sheep. And the examples of Jacob and David in particular are proofs, that the keeping of these was not usually committed to servants and strangers, as we generally find it in these parts; but men of the greatest quality and substance, the children of the family, nay, the masters and owners themselves, made it their business, and esteemed the looking to their flocks a care and employment in no case below them. Hence probably came that frequent metaphor of styling kings the shepherds of their people; hence Israel, God's peculiar treasure, are so often styled *the sheep of his pasture*; hence the ancient prophecies described the Messiah in the character of a shepherd; which accordingly he thinks it no dishonour to represent his government of and tender concern for mankind under, in this place. Intimating thereby, that he was not only the watcher and director, but the master and proprietor of the flock. Hence, lastly, David was a most significant type, not of his government only, but of that entire affection and concern for the preservation of

his spiritual sheep, when hazarding his life, and slaying the lion and the bear which came to prey upon his flock, and rescuing out of their jaws a poor helpless lamb seized by those ravenous beasts.

But although this consideration rendered a similitude so well understood both seasonable and reputable with the Jews, yet I presume there was another, which might at least as much induce him to make choice of it. One that arises from the very nature and disposition of this sort of animals, and carries some resemblance and proportion to the mind and temper of the persons signified in this metaphor. Therefore let it be considered,

2. Secondly, That sheep, as all of us very well know, are remarkable for their peculiar simplicity and sweetness of temper. There is something in them that looks so innocent and inoffensive, so peaceable and gentle, so patient and submissive, so honest and undesigning, that they gain more upon the tenderness of mankind than most other creatures. They are not beasts of prey or force, of sullenness or subtlety. They are apt indeed to stray: but they do it in a manner that moves our pity rather than our anger. For they do it heedlessly, without the least appearance of stubbornness; and are glad to be reduced again, and easily obey the shepherd's call.

Now these qualities are so many lively images of that plainness and probity, that modesty and humility, that quietness and submission, which prepare and fit men for embracing the doctrine of Christ. A doctrine calculated for the peace and good correspondence of mankind, and therefore by no means agreeable to those monsters in human shape, the bears and wolves and tigers, that bite and devour one another. A doctrine that inculcates justice and equity and fair dealing, and is not like to recommend itself to those knavish foxes that take a pride in the crafty contrivances for outwitting and overreaching one another; but fitted for *Israelites indeed*, in whom is no falsehood or guile. A doctrine that requires strict purity, enjoining every one to *possess his vessel in sanctification and honour*; and so never to be well relished by those goats and swine, who will be sure to tread this pearl under foot, and disdain a religion that forbids them to wallow in the filth of intemperance and riot, and any manner of sensual polluted pleasures. In one word, a doctrine fitted to persuade, and so not like to lose its effect upon the meek and unprejudiced, the honest and the conscientious, those that are willing to be instructed and easy to be reclaimed: but never designed to bear down the obstinate and perverso, whose pride or passions or interests will not consent to hear it without partiality and prepossession.

Such is the nature of the Christian religion, and such must be the qualifications of all that embrace it heartily and to purpose. For though it be the very end of this religion to correct and sweeten the tempers of men, and bring them off from these indispositions, yet still we are to remember that the will is the part to be wrought upon: and let the remedy be never so powerful in itself, no service can be done to a patient that refuses to apply it. That therefore some are cured, and others in no degree relieved, proceeds not from want of

virtue in the medicine, but because some are orderly, and content to undergo the operation, and others are unruly, and inflexibly set against it. They who submit to it soon find the benefit. The happy improvements made by their own ingenuous dealing, and the assisting grace of God, which never fails to succeed our desires and endeavours after holiness, are quickly discerned to make a mighty change in them, by subduing the corrupt affections of nature, and exerting all those heavenly qualities which in the best and strictest sense justify this metaphor denominating them Christ's sheep. By these they recommend and endear their souls to him, and engage his affections to so high a degree, that he does not disdain to compare the tenderness on his part with the incomprehensible love of God the Father to the Son; nor the cheerful duty on their part to the willing obedience of God the Son to that Father. And sure it is fit this should approach as near it as the frailties of human nature will allow it to rise.

Thus have I briefly explained the foundation of this parabolical allusion; and in so doing have made it easy for every reader to infer both his advantage and his duty: how gracious a Shepherd we are blessed with, and what dispositions in our minds, what habits in our practice flowing from thence, are expected in his sheep; how men must be prepared to receive the Christian religion, and how they are to live when they have received it. I will now conclude with one word or two concerning the goodness of this heavenly Shepherd; which is principally intended for the support of weak and melancholy mourners who humbly distrust their own poor performances, and are full of fears about their eternal state, because their honest intentions and endeavours are allayed with great failings, and interrupted with many sore and shocking temptations.

For this end I would put such persons in mind of two eminent passages in the prophets, the very purport whereof is comfort and encouragement to every soul within this fold, by a description of Christ's incomparable wisdom and gentleness, and care over all that make up this flock.

The first is that of Isaiah's fortieth chapter, verse 11. *He shall feed his flock like a shepherd, he shall gather the lambs with his arm, and carry them in his bosom, and shall gently lead those that are with young.* What can better express the affectionate concern and wonderful prudence of a gracious Master? One that distributes all necessary refreshments; that grace, which nourishes and strengthens us in a spiritual and divine life; that very body and blood of his, which is our mystical sustenance; for this is *feeding his flock like a shepherd*. One that protects and cherishes the harmless and the feeble, the meek and patient and peaceable minded, the men of good desires and hopeful beginnings; for these are the lambs in Christ's flock. One that tires none with hard usage and over-driving, lays no more upon any than they are able to bear, requires no more from any than they are able to perform; but kindly considers the slow and the heavy, allows for meanness of parts and attainments, for want of ability and opportunities, and thus *gently leads those that are with young*.

2. Yet, gentle though his discipline be, and large his allowances, and

practicable, may easy his commands, how often do we break loose from them! how often even far beyond what the frailties of our nature can fairly be pleaded in excuse for! But even here we are met by mercy and compassion again; he pities not only the ignorant, but those that are knowingly *out of the way* too, when they are content to see their error and return. His love prevents our final misery, makes up our breaches, stops our wild straggings, and snatches us back from ruin, even when we had brought ourselves to the very brink of the pit. To the sinners therefore that are humble and penitent, Ezekiel's description of Christ's pastoral care speaks health and consolation, ch. xxxiv. 16. *I will seek that which was lost, and bring again that which was driven away, and will bind up that which was broken, and will strengthen that which was sick.* And what unthankful, what vile wretches are we now, if we do not make it our constant endeavour to know and love and serve and imitate this good Shepherd! O let that prayer of the apostle's be ours, and let our lives give evidence that we pray it in good earnest:

May the God of peace, that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, make us perfect in every good work to do his will, working in us that which is wellpleasing in his sight; to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.

THE THIRD SUNDAY AFTER EASTER.

THE COLLECT.

ALMIGHTY God, who shewest to them that be in error the light of thy truth, to the intent that they ^amay return into the way of righteousness; Grant unto all them that are admitted into the fellowship of Christ's religion, that they may eschew those things that are contrary to their profession, and follow all such things as are agreeable to the same; through our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

THE EPISTLE. 1 St. Peter ii. 11.

11 *Dearly beloved, I beseech you as* 11. Consider, your citizens and pilgrims, abstain from citizenship is in another world, *fleshy lusts, which war against the soul; that in this you are but passengers; and therefore gratify not those sensual appetites which aim at present enjoyments, and are opposite to those desires of the soul that place and seek their true happiness in heaven.*

12 *Having your conversation honest among the Gentiles: that, whereas they speak against you as evil-doers, they may*

^a Heb. xiii. 20.

by your good works, which they shall behold, glorify God in the day of visitation.

13 *Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake: whether it be to the king, as supreme;*

14 *Or unto governors, as unto them that are sent by him for the punishment of evil-doers, and for the praise of them that do well.*

15 *For so is the will of God, that with well doing ye may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men:*

16 *As free, and not using your liberty for a cloke of maliciousness, but as the servants of God.*

17 *Honour all men. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honour the king.* even heathens themselves. Bear an affectionate regard to all your fellow Christians—&c.

13. See comment on Epist. of 4th S. aft. Epiph. for the sense of this and the three following verses.

17. Pay every man the respect due to his character, respec

COMMENT.

THE Epistle for this day begins with enjoining our endeavours to obtain that blessing which the Collect prays for: it admonishes us to behave ourselves as becomes strangers and pilgrims, which the principles of the Christian religion (by inculcating the belief of a future, as our chief and proper happiness) have taught us to esteem ourselves. And it adds a very substantial reason why we should deny those appetites which pursue the present enjoyments too eagerly, because the views of sense and those of faith are so very different and contrary to each other. How this comes to pass, and why it cannot be otherwise, the reader may find an account in the comment on the Epistle for the second Sunday in Lent, as he may of the remaining part of this portion of Scripture: the obedience required to our governors, the measures of and motives urged for it, in that on the Epistle for the fourth Sunday after Epiphany. So that I think myself at liberty to proceed to the consideration of the Gospel, having nothing here material which hath not been spoken to already; especially if, concerning any doubts that may arise upon the former part of the 17th verse, (though that seems to be sufficiently clear of itself,) the Epistles for the second and third Sundays after Epiphany shall be thought necessary to be consulted.

THE THIRD SUNDAY AFTER EASTER.

THE GOSPEL. St. John xvi. 16.

16 *Jesus said to his disciples, A little while, and ye shall not see me: and again,* 16. The time is now approaching when I shall be

^b See also Epist. for Epiph. and Adv. S. 1.

a little while, and ye shall see me, because I go to the Father. taken from you (by death); but that separation shall not be long, for I will return and converse with you again (after my resurrection at the end of three days); yet this also shall be but a short interview, because I must ascend into heaven.

17 *Then said some of his disciples among themselves, What is this that he saith unto us, A little while, and ye shall not see me: and again, a little while, and ye shall see me: and, Because I go to the Father?* 17, 18. His disciples, who were still confounded at every mention of his death and resurrection, knew not what to make of these dark expressions.

18 *They said therefore, What is this that he saith, A little while? we cannot tell what he saith.*

19 *Now Jesus knew that they were desirous to ask him, and said unto them, Do ye enquire among yourselves of that I said, A little while, and ye shall not see me: and again, a little while, and ye shall see me?*

20 *Verily, verily, I say unto you, That ye shall weep and lament, but the world shall rejoice: and ye shall be sorrowful, but your sorrow shall be turned into joy.* 20. The sufferings and death I am about to undergo shall be matter of extreme sorrow and discomfort to you; but the world shall insult and triumph greatly upon that occasion. But your sorrow shall be short, and swallowed up in the joy of beholding me risen from the dead.

21 *A woman when she is in travail hath sorrow, because her hour is come: but as soon as she is delivered of the child, she remembereth no more the anguish, for joy that a man is born into the world.* 21, 22. And as that of a woman in travail is succeeded by a solid and durable joy; so shall yours be upon my rising from death, and by all the benefits attending that resurrection: which will prove it past the power and malice of my enemies and yours to deprive you of the satisfaction this shall bring to you.

22 *And ye now therefore have sorrow: but I will see you again, and your heart shall rejoice, and your joy no man taketh from you.*

COMMENT.

THE importance of this passage is no doubt expressed in the paraphrase, if we regard its first sense and immediate design, the time when, the occasion upon which, and the persons to whom it was spoken. But why may we not, as St. Augustine advises here, enlarge our thoughts a little by looking upon the disciples to be, as they then really were, the church universal in so many persons? In this extended sense their calamity will represent every good man's affliction; the shortness of that will answer to the momentary troubles of the present life; the three days' absence of our Lord to that comparatively *little while* (for a little while even this is when set against eternity) between his glorious ascent into heaven and his infinitely more glorious return

to judgment: the triumphs of his resurrection will be a proper emblem of that last day, when *all enemies shall be put under his feet*, and death subdued, not by the head only, but by each member of his mystical body: and lastly, the joy his disciples conceived at our Lord's restoring himself to them the third day will prefigure that inexpressible satisfaction which must needs flow from the sight and enjoyment of his glorified body and presence, and the blisses of an immutable state in heaven.

Thus surely we shall very well promote our church's design in recommending this scripture to our attention yearly: and to make the best improvement I can of our concern in it, I shall briefly consider the state of good men at present as a state of trouble; and then the quality of that succeeding joy which they are allowed to expect and depend upon, both as a comfort under and a recompense for their present trouble.

1. For justifying the former of these considerations we need not have recourse to the ages of persecution; but may venture to suppose the most profound tranquillity with regard to church and state: and yet even thus I appeal to common experience, whether any good man's affairs have been in so perfect repose, that he should, with regard to his own particular, have cause to think the world misrepresented when called *a valley of tears*, and the adversities so incident to human nature the taxes as it were and encumbrances upon life. Shew me the man whose term of years hath been all white, chequered in no part with losses or disappointments, with injuries or vexations, in his estate or in his reputation, in his own person, or in some very dear to him, whose sufferings he ought to be affected with, and in good measure to esteem his own.

These things are so notorious, so common to the greatest and best of the sons of men, that the minds of some thinking persons have been confounded at them. And the more ignorant have called that the tyranny and blindness of fortune, which Christians are taught to believe the disposition of an infinitely wise and just and good Being.

But yet, be the things never so reasonable in themselves, trials they are still to the persons lying under them. Many considerations may prevail for bearing our chastisements decently, but none can hinder such from being at the present not *joyous but grievous*. With the woman in this Gospel, we may find reason to entertain our travail with bravery, to forget, nay, even to bless it for the good fruit we find from it: but the pain is still pain, the sense of it acute for the time; and the throes must be over before they can be forgotten, for *joy that a man is born into the world*.

But let us suppose a providence so propitious as shall screen a man from all occasions of disquiet from without, yet how shall he escape those too just uneasinesses that arise from within? Must not every one be born again by repentance and *renewing of the mind*? And hath not the spiritual birth its pangs and violent convulsions too? Let the returning prodigals say what agonies of conscience, what reproaches, what terrors, what zeal, what prayers, what careful toils,

what tedious conflicts it hath cost them, before they had strength to come to this birth. They whose early principles and pious education have saved the trouble of a thorough change have yet *the flesh and its affections to crucify*; and can there be a crucifixion without torment? Can a *right hand be cut off* without smart? or a *right eye be plucked out*, and the party never feel it? No sure. So long as there are injuries and misfortunes without, and lusts and frailties within, and hazards from both, so long, in a greater or a less degree, may every one most truly apply to himself what our Lord here hath said to his disciples, *and ye now therefore have sorrow.*

II. But praised be God, that sorrow is not to last always; and Christians are happy above the rest of mankind, that they can see to the end of it. For such is that joy promised in the close of this Gospel, which makes my second head; and this, according to the description given of it there, comes now to be considered in the three following respects:

1. The ground of it, in those words, *I will see you again.* How reviving was the accomplishment of this promise to his disciples, when, at his return from the empty tomb, they found all their hopes alive again, their faith confirmed, and their courage rendered invincible in the sight and enjoyment of him! But if the continuance of this for forty days only could inspire so just a joy, what raptures, what transports must possess all the faithful when they shall attain the *end of their faith, even the salvation of their souls*; when they shall see and dwell and converse, and reign with their dear Lord for ever; when their own bodies shall be glorified, this veil of flesh and frailty drawn away; when faith and hope shall cease and be swallowed up in fruition; and, to sum up all in St. John's phrase, (which indeed implies and comprehends all,) when they shall be drawn into a likeness with God, and *see him as he is!*

2. This leads me to consider a second property of this joy, the truth and solidity of it, I mean, intimated in those words, *your heart shall rejoice.* The enjoyments this world affords are rather appearances than any substance and reality of what they are commonly taken for. Those pleasures that are sinful run so low, and leave such terrible stings behind, that in the midst of that laughter the heart is sorrowful; and even those that are innocent must not claim this title of satisfactions; to which nothing in truth can have right which is not commensurate to the powers and desires of a reasonable soul. And this nothing can be but a feeling of the love and favour of God, and a delight resulting from those things which conduce to his honour, and are agreeable to his will. We see what more than conquest this disposition of mind enabled the apostles to attain even in persecutions and torments and death; and shall not that which carried them out against all the violence of their bitterest enemies be much more perfect when *all enemies shall be destroyed*? Shall not that which brought under the reluctancies of human nature be more exquisite when all infirmities of that nature are done away? If the heart of good men can rejoice when the flesh is in fear and grief, they will

certainly rejoice much more when the body is above suffering, when every contrary passion and every calamity that could provoke them is perfectly at an end. Such a torrent as this must overflow all its banks; or rather there will be no banks, no check or confinement: nothing beyond it to be desired, except the continuance of that which is incapable of larger increase; and of this too we have assurance, in that most comfortable clause which speaks the certainty and duration of this joy;

3. The third property expressed in those words, *Your joy no man taketh from you.* Now this is a mode of speech set to denote an utter impossibility of losing this joy; and that neither any human nor any other means have it in their power to deprive us of it. And this is a most valuable circumstance indeed, such as perfectly distinguishes between our future and all our present joys. Of those we have at best but very slippery hold; and were there more in them than really there is, yet the pleasure must needs be damped with that melancholy prospect that they will one day forsake us, and we cannot be certain that they will not do it very quickly too.

So reasonable it appears to wean our affections from those things which are not, cannot be our rest; so just to lessen our esteem of them, and to lay the whole stress upon that one thing that alone can avail us. Suffer me therefore to apply to my present purpose that of the prophet Jeremy, *Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, neither let the mighty man glory in his might, let not the rich man glory in his riches: but let him that glorieth glory in this, that he understandeth and knoweth me, saith the Lord.* And reason good, for *this is life eternal, to know him the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom he hath sent.* It is the only way to it in this world, and it is the bliss of it in that which is to come. And a bliss, in strict speaking, it could not be if it were not eternal; without interruption, without conclusion; liable to no decays of nature, no wastings of time; nothing without to destroy it, nothing within to diminish or impair it; subject only to the will of the Almighty Giver, and given with a resolution never to be taken back again; *for the promises of God are unchangeable, and his gifts without repentance.*

Of such comfortable import are the words of this Gospel, spoken to the disciples in a very critical juncture. And, if duly considered, they will have a like effect upon us as they had upon them, in proportion as their circumstances and ours agree. But surely they are without excuse who do not improve them to these two purposes at least:

1. To quicken us in the pursuit after so excellent a joy; there being this good correspondence between the offices of the day, that the Gospel enforces the exhortation in the Epistle, of considering ourselves as *strangers and pilgrims*, and so cutting those desires short, the objects whereof can stay with us but *a little while*: and the Collect prayeth for grace to *eschew those things that are contrary to our Christian profession, and to follow all such things as are agreeable to the same.* To which nothing can be more contrary than a sensual and worldly mind; nor any thing more agreeable than such earnest desires and

^f Jer. ix. 23, 24.

^g John xvii. 3.

^h Rom. xi. 29.

zealous endeavours after future and spiritual happiness, as will not suffer themselves to be diverted by any treacherous allurements here below. How lamentable then is the coldness and neglect so visible and so general upon this occasion ! But especially how scandalous is the stupidity of those senseless wretches, who, instead of aspiring after, despise and scoff at this joy ; who take a great deal of pains not to have any part in it, and boast their refusal as an act of wit and gallantry ! as if heaven were below a man of quality's acceptance, and irreligion and profaneness were the standard of good-breeding and good sense ! *How long, ye simple ones, will ye love simplicity, and the scornors delight in scorning, and fools hate knowledge ? O turn your ear to reproof* betimes, before your ease slay you, and your perverseness destroy you.

2. The other use we should make of this discourse is to compose our minds in time of trouble, to consider that this cannot last always, that patience bringeth forth precious fruit, and that it will be our own fault if our labours and sufferings do at last prove abortive ; to set the *lightness* of the *affliction* against the *weight of glory*, and the *momentary* passage of the one against the *eternal* stability of the other ; for this would be sure to cast the scale, and enable us, in humble imitation of our blessed Master, to *endure the cross for the joy that is set before us*. Put the utmost and worst of the case, that we are called to *resist unto blood* ; yet even in death we have this reflection to support us, that there is but that one pain more, and then *the man is born*. Born into a world of bliss and immortality, to a life of joy most exquisite and ravishing to the heart, and that *a joy which no man taketh from him*. That joy may God of his infinite mercy make every reader of this discourse partaker of, through the merits and mediation of him who hath shed his blood to purchase it for us ! Jesus Christ, the Son of his love, to whom with the Father and the Holy Spirit be all honour and glory now and for evermore. Amen.

THE FOURTH SUNDAY AFTER EASTER.

THE COLLECT.

O ALMIGHTY GOD, who alone canst order the unruly ^a wills and affections of sinful men ; Grant unto thy people, that they may love the thing which thou commandest, and desire that which thou dost promise ; that so, among the sundry and manifold changes of the world, our hearts may surely there be fixed, where true joys are to be found ; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

ⁱ Prov. i. 22.

^a James i. 17 ; Phil. ii. 13 ; Eph. ii. 8, 9, 10.

THE EPISTLE. James i. 17.

17 *Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning.* 17. So far is God from being the author of sin to us, that every thing which tends to make us good, or

is itself so, every spiritual perfection, comes to us from heaven: all the endowments of nature and grace are given by him who created all the luminous bodies, and in this excels them all, even the sun itself, that he does not vary, nor remove at a distance from us (like that in its daily or its yearly motions), but is always the same, and always at hand.

18 *Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures.* 18. His own mere goodness moved him to make us his children, by means of his word, the instrument of our new birth, that we (like the firstfruits under the law) might be the best of our kind, and consecrated to his service.

19 *Wherefore, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath:* 19. Let this then induce us to be forward in learning that word, modest in attempting to teach, of a meek and persuadable temper.

20 *For the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God.* 20. For the violence of passion will obstruct the discharge of the duty God requires from us.

21 *Wherefore lay apart all filthiness and superfluity of naughtiness, and receive with meekness the engrafted word, which is able to save your souls.* 21. We must therefore get quit of those sensual and polluted affections, (the cutting away whereof was intimated by circumcision,) the suffering which to grow will, like suckers in a tree, hinder that graft of the word from bearing fruit, which, if received with due temper, is able to save the souls in which it is put.

COMMENT.

THE scripture now before us being more than commonly difficult, and particularly upon the account of some metaphorical allusions contained in it, I shall treat of each passage in the order they lie, and having first explained them a little more largely, shall then deduce such inferences as are most practical and proper.

In order to understand the beginning of it, let it be considered that the apostle had before directed every one ^b *who lacks wisdom to ask it of God*, and afterwards had set himself to refute the false notions some entertained of him and his providence; to the disposal whereof having rightly ascribed all events and changes that befall men, they from thence very erroneously inferred that he was the author and cause of all the sin committed by men ^c.

This argument seems more particularly levelled at an opinion of the Pharisees, a sect of all among the Jews in highest credit and veneration.

^b Ver. 5.^c Ver. 12, 13, 14, &c.

tion. Of these Josephus says that ^d*they imputed all things to fate*, but adds that *they did not do this in such a manner as absolutely to destroy free-will*. For reconciling this seeming inconsistency, we shall do well to take notice that they laid great stress upon the particular frame and constitution of men, their humours and complexions, and the influences of those planets and stars under which they were born. Thus they made the virtues and vices of men to depend upon these causes; ^eand so charged upon God, the director of these causes, that good or evil which men could hardly with good sense be said to choose by those who held them to be by nature formed for, and from their birth necessarily determined to the one or the other. This remark will be of some use to us in discerning not only the true occasion and force of the apostle's reasoning, but also the propriety of the terms in which it is expressed.

In opposition to this dangerous scheme St. James, writing to Christians converted from Judaism, asserts every advantage conducing to our virtue and perfection to descend upon us indeed from heaven; yet not from that heaven where the sun and other luminous bodies move, but *from above*. (For this peculiar energy some have attributed to that word *above*.) They come down from him who dwells in those that (according to a known distinction in use with the Jews) are called *the highest heavens*. Even from him who is truly styled *the Father of lights*, as he created and constituted those lights and their influences. Now he disposes his gifts and graces in such a manner that, whether they come to us immediately from himself, or whether by the mediation and ministry of his creatures, still the conveyance makes no difference; but they are either way to be acknowledged his gifts. He is the author and source, the proprietor and the bestower of all goodness; and all below him are but in the nature of instruments to hand down, or pipes through which this Fountain chooses to pass the streams of his overflowing beneficence to any of us.

This doctrine the apostle hath shewn to be far preferable to the other, not only as more true, but more advantageous to mankind. For the appearances of the heavenly bodies vary, and their influences are more powerful or feeble in proportion as themselves are nearer to us or more distant from us. Now those bodies, being continually in motion, must consequently change their supposed power with their situation; as they rise or set, approach to or decline from our vertical point in their daily motion; and as they remove at a greater distance, or come back to our latitude in their yearly revolution: so that as themselves are not, so neither can the effects attributed to them be fixed and constant. But the Father of these lights is immutable and omnipresent: he is always at hand to hear and to help, and always both able and willing to do that which he knows to be most for the advantage of them who have recourse to him for succour and supplies.

Of this the apostle makes proof at the eighteenth verse, by an instance the most valuable of any that could possibly be imagined; the revelation of his truth in the Gospel of our blessed Saviour, which is meant there by *his word*; the making this an instrument of the

^d Antiq. lib. xviii. cap. 2.

^e Bull. Harm. Apost. Diss. ii. cap. xv.

highest honour and privilege, even our spiritual adoption : for by this word *he begat us*, the nature and advantages of which new birth and glorious relation to himself have been, I hope, sufficiently explained and enforced in another part of this work¹. To these he adds the design served by those benefits, the setting Christians above the rest of mankind, distinguishing them by the best of dispensations, and by a holiness of life agreeable to it ; consecrating them to his own use and service, and asserting them for his own peculiar, in a degree vastly more honourable and beneficial than any thing of this kind had ever been vouchsafed in, even to the Jews themselves. For all this seems to be implied in that allusion to the old law which styles us a *kind of firstfruits of his creatures*. And then, as an irrefragable evidence of the kindness and gracious disposition of this heavenly Father, it is said, that all this was his free and voluntary act : for *of his own will he begat us*, &c.

Thus far proceeds the argumentative part of this Epistle, and how fully it answers the apostle's purpose, these two remarks will easily inform us :

1. By declaring God the author of *every good and perfect gift*, he strengthens his exhortation in the beginning of the chapter, to beg of him a supply of all necessary wisdom. This being a gift agreeable to the excellence of his nature to bestow, and to the occasions of our own to desire ; as that which above any other conduces to the true goodness and utmost perfection of mankind attainable in the present and in a future state.

2. By observing the unchangeableness of God's nature and will, he hath abundantly confuted the error of those mistaken men, who, by holding a fatality in all events and actions, do from thence slide into a consequence not easy to be avoided, the horrible impiety of charging the sins of men upon God, the supposed ordainer of that fatality. For what can be a greater contradiction than that the giver of all the good should likewise be the author of all the evil in the world ? This would argue the most direct contrariety in the same mind. Such a one as some heretics saw too absurd to be maintained, and so were obliged to take sanctuary in another as absurd—that of two first principles, the one the cause of good, the other of evil. As a farther confirmation of this, the gracious methods of salvation, God's revealing his gospel on purpose to reform and improve and save mankind from sin, are taken notice of : which all proceeding of his own mere motion, shew that the wickedness of men is most displeasing to him. This renders him incapable of promoting that very thing by tempting to it, which he of his own accord hath contrived so admirable an expedient to destroy, by so expressly warning men against, and so wonderfully preserving them from it.

These are the inferences most suitable to the occasion and immediate design of this passage : but we, who have liberty to consider it in a greater latitude, shall not do our duty, except we learn from hence,

1. To ascribe with all possible thankfulness to this good God alone every advantage we enjoy, whether of nature, of fortune, or of grace : not taking to ourselves the glory of any which our own endeavours

¹ Epistle for Sunday after Christmas.

help to procure; not depending upon any human assistances; not esteeming the persons whose goodness hath been of use to us above their due desort. Since neither could our own labours have availed us without God's blessing upon those labours; nor could our friends have served us, except he who vouchsafes to choose them for instruments of conveying his mercy to us had not only furnished those friends with the ability, but inspired them with the inclination to do it.

2. Hence we are likewise taught where in particular to lay the inestimable benefit of our spiritual regeneration and salvation. That it is ontirely owing to God, and an instance of his free and undeserved grace. Which is true of the design and methods of it with regard to mankind in general; and equally true of all the assistances and advantages for attaining it afforded to each man in particular. The beginning, the progress, and the accomplishment of this glorious work having no possible foundation or motive in the merit of any who are admitted to partake of it. For to every one of these the greatest curse and misery that could happen were, to be treated according to his deservings.

3. It is observable that the apostle assigns to the *word of truth* a part in this work; and such as intimates it to be the instrumental cause of our new and spiritual birth. Here, ordinarily speaking, the operation begins; and what sort of operation that is, and of how great consequence its efficacy, may be gathered from the directions which, upon mention of this word, the apostle, in the three following verses, lays down for our behaviour with regard to it.

1. The first is, diligent endeavours to be instructed in this word, meant by being *swift to hear*. That is, making use of all proper means and opportunities for understanding our duty. And this extends not only to our frequenting those public assemblies where it is explained and enforced by an order of men set apart by God for that purpose; but also to those other private helps of reading and meditation, consulting with good books, and conversing with good friends, who have the skill and the charity to inform us where we are ignorant, to set us right where we are mistaken, and to encourage and quicken us where we are heartless and remiss. In all which the greater care is requisite, because this is the spiritual food of our souls, and therefore, like that which sustains our bodies, ought to be our daily bread.

2. The second is modesty, or *being slow to speak*. Not taking upon us to be teachers through a vain conceit of our own sufficiency. Which, though it might perhaps be intended for a reproof to the Gnostics of that age, is yet but too applicable to multitudes of every age. For multitudes there always are who, professing themselves to be wise, take the most effectual course to become fools. For it is never to be expected that they should improve in learning who imagine they have no farther improvements to make, and are more importunate to be heard than forward to hear.

3. A third direction is the government of our passions, particularly that of anger: to which purpose St. James adds, *slow to wrath*, at the 19th, and recommends its opposite virtue, *meekness*, at the 21st

verse. The necessity whereof is declared at the 20th verse, by saying, that *the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God*. This is by some understood to regard the Zealots among the Jews. A sect who, upon pretence of more than ordinary concern for the honour of God and religion, took the liberty to act in defiance of all law and order, and even common humanity. But it certainly is a seasonable reproof to all of any persuasion who make the warmth of their zeal either a pretence or a real occasion of gratifying the bitterness of their own disposition. For it acquaints us that the nature of Christianity is to be mild and gentle, peaceable and beneficent: that it is intended to cool and calm, not to kindle or inflame our passions: and that, be our intentions never so sincere, the method of promoting religion is certainly wrong, and the business of it never to be done by heat and fury, uncharitableness and contention.

Permit me here to name one sort of wrath which in especial manner obstructs the word. It is that which takes it amiss to be admonished or reprehended, and counts them its enemies who tell the truth. When men resent it as a wrong and indignity, and harden themselves yet more as oft as those vices are exposed, which their own conscience upbraids them with the guilt of. If this be done, as it ought always to be, with solid reasoning and in general terms, the preacher only discharges his duty. If it be done with spite and particular reflection, so as to expose the man rather than the vice, this is a weakness so below his character as should provoke pity rather than anger. But there can be no reason, in either case, why the party who feels himself concerned should not amend his fault, and make some profit even of another's indiscretion.

4. Another direction here is, to lay aside *all filthiness and superfluity of naughtiness*. The latter of these phrases hath been largely explained heretofore. And of both, which signify sensuality and fleshly lusts, it is evident that these desires are so irreconcilable with that purity of heart and life enjoined by the gospel, that it is impossible for any who indulges and addicts himself to them to have any value for, relish of, or benefit by the saving truths of it^a. But this having been formerly insisted on, I proceed,

Lastly, to observe the significance of that metaphor which commands us to receive the *ingrafted* word. Engrafting, you know, incorporates one sort of plant with a tree of another; by which means the old stock is not destroyed, but a new quality so superinduced that the fruit is from thenceforth changed and made more generous. Thus the *word* must be thoroughly joined to us and made of a piece with us; it must penetrate and mingle with, and influence every faculty of our minds. The wild suckers which sprout from the old sour stock must be cut low, and kept under, that the new cion may receive nourishment and shoot more vigorously. Thus nature is not taken away, but its luxuriances pared off. Our appetites are not extinguished, but improved and turned to nobler objects: our affections (according to the Colloct for the day) from being unruly alter their taste, and from thenceforth love that which God commands, and desire that which he doth

^a Epistle for Circumcision.

^b Gospel for Serapion Sunday.

^c Ver. 21

promise; and by making this happy change in our originally corrupt temper and inclinations, and so becoming a principle of a now and nobler produot, we have our fruit unto holiness, and the end everlasting life. And thus it is that the ingrafted word becomes able to save our souls.

THE FOURTH SUNDAY AFTER EASTER.

THE GOSPEL. St. John xvi. 5.

5 *Jesus said unto his disciples, Now I go my way to him that sent me; and none of you asketh me, Whither goest thou?*

6 *But because I have said these things unto you, sorrow hath filled your heart.*

7 *Nevertheless I tell you the truth; It is expedient for you that I go away: for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send him unto you.*

because some things to be done by him are incompatible with my stay among you.

8 *And when he is come, he will reprove the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment:*

9 *Of sin, because they believe not on me; that it was a fault not to believe one whose mission shall be so amply confirmed by his wonderful gifts.*

10 *Of righteousness, because I go to my Father, and ye see me no more; to God, who could not so receive and assert an impostor.*

11 *Of judgment, because the prince of this world is judged.*

all the wicked by the dominion he shall exercise over evil spirits.

12 *I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now. condition is not yet capable, (such as the nature of Christ's kingdom, rejection of the Jews, calling in of the Gentiles, &c.)*

13 *Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth: for he shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak: and he will shew you things to come.*

14 *He shall glorify me: for he shall receive of mine, and shall shew it unto you. for whatever knowledge you receive from him he first received of me.*

15 *All things that the Father hath are mine: therefore said I, that he shall take*

7. It is more for your benefit and the advantage of my gospel, that this Advocate to plead my cause and yours should supply my

absence; because some things to be done by him are incompatible with

9. He shall convince men

10. And shall prove me a true teacher by that ascent

11. And that justice shall be done upon the devil and

12. Several things he shall instruct you in, of which your

abrogation of the ritual law,

the Jews, calling in of the

Gentiles, &c.)

13. You may depend on

his guidance, because he

shall not utter any deceitful

inventions of his own, but

teach you from God, and give

you the gift of prophecy.

14. All his proceedings

shall turn to my honour;

him he first received of me.

15. I say of me, because

all the excellencies of God

of mine, and shall shew it unto you. the Father are communicated to me. And therefore his Spirit is mine, and all that he does by commission from him he likewise does by mine.

COMMENT.

THE person and offices of the Holy Ghost, and the ends mentioned here to be served by his coming, will fall more seasonably under consideration at another time. That which I would now speak to, is a passage which seems to give us some aim for judging (so far as we are concerned to know) what methods the Holy Spirit uses to take in the ordinary operations of his grace; which I conceive we may get some light into by attending to that expression at ver. 13, where the Spirit is said to guide the apostles into all truth.

I do not by this go about to determine the particular manner of God's grace working upon our minds in every case. For who is able to express the infinite variety of excellent arts by which he wins us over to his own heavenly purposes? All I aim at is to gather so much as may preserve us from error, and help forward the practice of our own duty. To which end alone it is that I would now consider the true importance of that guidance ascribed there to the Holy Ghost.

Now the word which we render *to guide*, does properly signify *leading a traveller the way*. The manner of which is thus explained by Moses: who, speaking of the Israelites being conducted through the wilderness, says that God *went before them to search them out a place to pitch their tents in, in fire by night, to shew them by what way they should go, and in a cloud by day*. Here we have the office of a guide explained, by *shewing the way on which they should go, and going before them in that way*. Thus was the angel of God's presence a guide to the Israelites of old; and thus is the grace of God's Spirit a guide to Christians now. Directing them what course to take, warning them against the pits and precipices, the difficulties and by-paths by which, if destitute of such direction, they might wander or perish in their journey; and so bringing them forward in that holiness of which himself is the perfection and the brightest pattern.

Another interpretation, deduced from this in scripture, is that of assisting and supporting men in their passage. Thus God is said, in the chapter last cited, to bear those Israelites *as a man beareth his own son, in all the way that they went*. The similitude is taken from parents and nurses holding children by the hand, being content to go their slow pace, and not only guiding but supporting and guarding them also. Thus are those passages commonly understood where God is said to have *led Abraham throughout all the land of Canaan, to lead Joseph like a sheep, and his people like a flock, by the hand of Moses and Aaron, and the Messiah, the great Shepherd, gently to lead those that are with young*. And this sort of guidance the Holy Spirit performs when he condescends to our infirmities, accommodates himself to our capacities, and imparts his gifts and graces, not according to

^a ὁδους.

^b Deut. i. 33.

^c Ver. 31.

^d Josh. xxiv. 3.

^e Ps. lxxx. 3; Ps. lxxvii. 20.

^f Isa. xl. 11.

his own fulness and power to give, but in such proportions as the vessels into which they are poured are qualified to receive them. An instance whereof our blessed Lord hath left in the scripture now before us, by omitting to *say many things* unto his disciples which they at that time were not able to bear.

From hence the word came to be applied to the office of a master or teacher. Thus when Philip asks the eunuch^b whether he understood that prophecy of Isaiah which he found him reading, the answer is, *How can I, except some man should guide me?* This part of a guide then Philip by Divine appointment undertook, and how he discharged it is manifest from the following account: '*The eunuch said, I pray thee, of whom speaketh the prophet this? of himself, or of some other man? Then Philip opened his mouth, and began at the same scripture, and preached unto him Jesus.* His guidance then consisted in complying with the eunuch's desires to be better informed, satisfying his inquiries concerning the mysterious meaning of that prophecy, and from thence taking occasion to let him by degrees into the whole scheme of man's redemption by the sufferings and death of our Saviour Christ.

Such a guide is the Holy Ghost too: he enlightens dark eyes, but by such illumination as supposes a willingness to see. He leads men into paths of holiness and salvation, but then he expects a readiness to follow. He gives ability to perform that which without him never could be done, but it is that which will not be done neither without our own pains and concurrence. ^k*The meek (says David) he will guide in judgment, and the meek shall he learn his way.* But still they are the meek: and although he strengthen our weakness, and inspire our dispositions, and assist our endeavours to be good; yet is he nowhere said by an almighty and irresistible operation to compel the obstinate, or drag men along whether they will or no.

Hence it will be no difficult matter to reconcile those texts of Scripture which attribute our sanctification and salvation to the word, with some others which give the same effects to the Spirit of God. The short is, this is the efficient, that the instrumental cause. We cannot come to Christ except we be drawn, and it is his Spirit that draws us, and he draws us by the word. He gives a new turn to our thoughts and inclinations, disposes us to hearken and consider and endeavour; and then renders those actions and endeavours successful. So that all this is effected by application of proper means, by reasonable suggestions, by influences so gentle and sweet, that all is done with us and in us. The work is so much the Spirit's, that if we be treatable and willing to do our part, he will not fail to do his: and it is so much our own too, that if we refuse or neglect our part, he will not do it either for us or without us.

So good agreement may we easily perceive between the Epistle and the Gospel for this day; the *word of truth* that begets us, and the *Spirit of truth* that guides us. So exactly alike are the predispositions necessary for profiting by both. I conclude therefore with most earnestly exhorting every man, as he values his salvation, so to receive the one, and submit to the conduct of the other, that each may attain

^k Ver. 12.^b Acts viii. 31.ⁱ Ver. 34, 35.^k Ps. xxv.

its proper effect upon him. And since ¹ *Almighty God alone can order the unruly wills and affections of sinful men*, let us not be wanting to pray with our church, that he would grant unto all his people to love the thing which he commandeth, and desire that which he doth promise; that so among the sundry and manifold changes of the world our hearts may surely there be fixed where true joys are to be found, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

THE FIFTH SUNDAY AFTER EASTER.

THE COLLECT.

O LORD, from whom all good things do come; Grant to us thy humble servants, that by thy holy inspiration we may think those things that be good, and by thy merciful guiding may perform the same, through our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

THE EPISTLE. St. James i. 22.

22 *But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves.*

23 *For if any be a hearer of the word, and not a doer, he is like unto a man beholding his natural face in a glass:*

24 *For he beholdeth himself, and goeth in his way, and straightway forgetteth what manner of man he was.*

hath shewed to himself, if he do not correct those faults which are thus represented to his view.

25 *But whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty, and continueth therein, he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed.*

Which is called a law of liberty, because it frees us from the bondage of the Mosaic institution, from the guilt and punishment and from the dominion of sin; and treats us as free men and sons, rather than servants. (See Epistle for Sunday after Christmas.)

26 *If any man among you seem to be religious, and bridleth not his tongue, but deceiveth his own heart, this man's religion is vain.*

27 *Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world.*

23, 24. The latter will do you no service without the former. For as men that in a glass see what is amiss in their face, but mend it not; so is a man whom the word

25. The man who is indeed the better for his hearing is he who considers and practises continually the moral precepts of the gospel.

26. The man who is indeed the better for his hearing is he who considers and practises continually the moral precepts of the gospel.

27. That religion which does not only appear fair to men, but is accepted and approved with God, consists in charity and purity.

COMMENT.

THE preparation of the mind requisite in order to receive the *word of truth* had been declared by St. James in the foregoing verses, and was made the subject of a discourse the last Lord's day. The design of this portion of Scripture is to prove that receiving that *word* in the very best manner is not sufficient. A truth so plain to any man of common consideration, that one would think there could not possibly be need of arguments to prove it. For what is this *word* but a system of laws which God under the gospel dispensation hath given men to direct and govern their actions by? And what is the end and intent of any law, but practice and obedience? Well therefore might the apostle here declare that the *hearers only, and not doers of the word, are deceivers of their own selves*. And well it were if the too general behaviour of Christians did not render it but too necessary for the apostle at that time, and the ministers of this word at all times, to warn their hearers against that deceit. A deceit which, how common soever in fact, is yet in the reason of the thing so exceedingly absurd, that one would stand amazed to see any single person capable of being imposed upon by it.

However, since this delusion does but too manifestly prevail, a better method for giving check to it we cannot take than to enforce the apostle's argument here. Which I shall make it my endeavour to do, by shewing, first, what the being a *doer* of the *word* does really import: and secondly, how gross and fatal that deceit is, which they who take up short of this put upon themselves. Under each of these I shall need to go no farther for arguments than what St. James here hath either expressly urged upon or sufficiently intimated to us.

I. I begin with explaining what a *doer* of the word does really import, and when it is that any of us is such.

1. Now here we are to consider, in the first place, that the *word* is a term of large extent, and comprehends the whole of that which God hath revealed and prescribed to us. Consequently, to be *doers of the word*, it is requisite that we take the law as we find it laid before us. It is from hence David pleads his own sincerity, and grounds his hope and trust. ^b *Then shall I not be ashamed, says he, when I have respect unto all thy commandments.* It is this evidence of our love and this claim to his, that our blessed Saviour means, when telling his disciples, ^c *Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you.* Hence it is that in the latter end of this chapter that man's religion is declared to be vain, who, upon making conscience of some other duties, is blown up into a false opinion of his own sanctity, though at the same time he ^d *bridle not his tongue*. A failing greatly to be lamented, and very usual among many who express a more than ordinary zeal for the outward and solemn exercises of religion; constant and devout attenders upon public prayers and sermons and sacraments; sober in their conversations, regular and exemplary in their families, just in their dealings even to a nicety; but malicious detractors, busy inquirers, bold censurers, and bitter backbiters. And of these it is that the apostle in particular repeats his observation,

^b Ps. cxix. 8.^c John xv. 14.^d Ver. 28.

that *they deceive their own hearts*. Because the men who allow themselves such liberties do naturally and almost insensibly fall into that fatal mistake of judging their own state by wicked and malicious comparisons. And from labouring to persuade their company into that opinion, do at last come to persuade themselves, that they are so much better in proportion as their slanders or reflections have made other people appear worse.

But although this be a deceit peculiar to the vices of the tongue, yet all in general deceive themselves who do not take *the word of truth* in its just and utmost comprehension. If therefore we speak comfort to our minds upon not being grossly and notoriously wicked; indulging in the mean while those lusts which no eye sees, and so our reputation is not wounded by: if we give readily in to those commands which interest or inclination dispose us to, but start back and fly off from others which are inconvenient, or go against the grain: nay, if our compliance with all the rest be never so strict and punctual, but some one darling bosom-vice be left unmortified; and we flatter our consciences with a false hope that the *Lord will pardon his servant in this thing*: such an obedience is but *almost Christian*. And though, with the rich young man in the Gospel, we be not *far from the kingdom of God*, yet are we not in it, nor upon these terms ever like to come at it. For, properly speaking, this is not to observe and submit to God's, but to make our own law, and choose our own conditions. Quite contrary to a state of subjection, which allows of no reserve in this case. Nor is any man a *doer of the word* in earnest and to purpose whose heart cannot give him that testimony of the Psalmist, *I hold strait all thy commandments, and all false ways I utterly abhor*.

2. They who are really *doers of the word* do it because it is *the word*. My meaning is, they are good upon a principle of religion, and in obedience to his authority who hath commanded them to be so. It is indeed the glory of religion, and will prove one day the heaviest condemnation of all who despise or neglect it, that it is accommodated to all the present pleasures and advantages becoming a wise man to desire and pursue. But still, though these are motives which may lawfully weigh with us, yet must they never be the principal, much less the only motives to piety and virtue. The reason is, because they can never answer our purpose by securing the steadiness of our obedience. For whatever does this must be itself what that obedience ought to be, lasting and unchangeable. But now, all pleasures and advantages of this life are fickle and uncertain; and therefore all that stands on so slippery a foundation must needs be liable to totter and fall with it. If profit, or ease, or honour, or applause be our views, what shall become of us when the face of affairs changes, when interest and duty are opposite, when men are so perverse as to hate us, and harm us, and to speak all manner of evil against us, because we are followers of that which is good? Must not a man who looks no further than this world, if he will act upon his own principle, find himself in such circumstances carried to profitable wickedness by the same arguments that before determined him to profitable goodness? In short, on which side so-

ever the advantage lies, he must follow it; and as oft as that shifts hands, his manners will not fail to change as nimbly with it. But now the will of God is immutable, and the equity of his laws stands fixed. This is rooted in the nature of things; and therefore this alone is a firm support for our virtue. He that acts in a due sense of such an obligation hath something to keep him always tight. His obedience will not be fickle, because the ground of it continues the same; neither will it be humoursome or partial, because, be the subject-matter of the command what it will, still the authority of the Lawgiver which binds it upon his conscience is in respect of every command the same. And thus this second qualification secures the first; for by *doing the word* as such, we shall certainly be disposed to do *all the word*.

3. *Doing the word* imports observing it in all that spiritual sense to which Christianity hath exalted our duty. To this effect it is that the twenty-fifth verse hath entitl'd the gospel *the perfect law of liberty*. A law that does not, like the Jewish, impose things of no intrinsic worth, such as are marks of slavery, but substantial and rational instances of obedience; worthy of minds that are generous; and a service that does not only comport with, but is itself a state of freedom. To what heights this carries our virtue, and how much more is required now than was esteemed sufficient under a former imperfect dispensation, is easy to be gathered from our Saviour's sermon on the mount. Nor hath St. James been wanting to intimate the same thing to us in the last verse of this chapter. He plainly distinguishes there between a religion which will pass very well upon men, and that which is necessary for recommending us to *God and the Father*. They see our actions only, and in regard of them we must be cautious: he is a searcher of hearts, and therefore nothing can gain his approbation which is not *pure and undefiled*. To please them we shall find it necessary to do no injustice: please him we cannot without doing all the good we can; by acts of mercy and pity; relief to the distressed, and redress to the injured, when these are in our power; condolence with them, and compassion for them, when no more is in our power. For all this no doubt is intended by *visiting the fatherless and widows in their afflictions*. And so again, a mortifying all our carnal appetites, getting above the temptations of sensuality and covetousness, refining all our desires, preserving chaste and holy hearts, and leading a rational and divine life; for this and nothing less we are to understand by *keeping a man's self unspotted from the world*. In short, the Christian religion expects from all its professors that they should not only eschew evil, but heartily hate and abstain from the very appearance of it; that they should cleanse their hearts as well as hands; that they should do all the good they can, and do it with delight; and that they should not only obey, but study to adorn the doctrine of their Lord in all things.

4. They only are to be esteemed *doers of the word* who proceed and persevere in their duty. For thus the apostle clearly explains himself at the twenty-fifth verse, *Whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty, and continueth therein, he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the word, this man shall be blessed in his deed*. It is from hence, in truth,

that the surest judgment can be made of any man's sincerity. For as the practice of religion is attended with many temporal conveniences, so they who proceed upon those false views may for some time pass upon the world, and even upon themselves, for persons of great probity and virtue. And yet if any difficulty rise, or suffering press upon him, the man and his false bottom are presently discovered; and that appearance of goodness, which, while prosperous and uninterrupted, drew the praise and admiration of all that beheld it, quickly provokes their scorn, by being found an appearance only, and is universally rejected both of God and man. Of this perseverance, and the necessity of it, there needs no more to be said, after our Lord's parable of the sower^f, who charges this defect upon the *stony* ground in particular; and allows none to be *good* ground which does not *bring forth fruit with patience, and bring it to perfection*.

I add, that the punishment of such as fall from a good course is most just, and the provocation upon some accounts more heinous than that given by men who were never virtuous at all. For such apostasy derives a double dishonour upon religion, and seems to say that it hath been weighed in the balance and found wanting. These men, it will be pretended, have known it and tried it, and yet, by renouncing it, they make no scruple to condemn their former principle of folly. Upon this ground it is that God declares by Ezekiel^g, that he who forsakes his righteousness and dies in a wicked course shall perish, without any regard to his former good works. And so again, that at what time soever the wicked man forsakes his wickedness and doth that which is lawful and right, he shall save his soul, and his past sins shall never rise up any more in judgment against him: the reason expressed in the one case is implied in the other, *because he considereth and turneth*^h. Of such mighty consequence it will prove, in divinity as well as law, what a man's last will shall be; for this in both cases revokes and undoes again all that went before, and the one makes as final and effectual a disposition of our souls as the other does of our estates.

Thus you have seen the true notion of *doing the word*, and how much goes to it; that it imports obedience to the word in its full comprehension; that as we must obey it all, so we must obey it upon a right principle; that we are to practise the word in that sense and perfection to which the gospel hath advanced the old moral law; and that none are esteemed faithful in this matter except they who continue *faithful unto the end*. From whence the inference is unavoidable, that all, short of these qualifications, is a *deceiving of ourselves*, and being no better than hearers only. The greatness and danger of which deceit I come now to act before you very briefly.

II. This is the second head I proposed, and in speaking to it I shall only in general explain the reason given by the apostle for this assertion, and then conclude.

The reason alleged is this: *For if any be a hearer of the word, and not a doer, he is like unto a man beholding his natural face in a glass*.

^f See Gospel for Sexagesima Sunday.

^g Ezek. xviii.

^h Ver. 27.

ⁱ Ver. 23, 24.

For he beholdeth himself, and goeth his way, and straightway forgetteth what manner of man he was. Now by resembling the word to a glass, it is the apostle's intention to convince *the hearers only*, and *not doers*, that they mistake the very end and proper use of *the word*. For the use of a glass is to represent men to themselves; and the end of that representation is not that they may sit and contemplate, and fall into rapturous admiration of their own imagined beauty, but that they may see, and so see as to correct, whatever upon that view is found to be amiss; thus to take effectual care that their persons and habit be comely and composed: which could not be taken, unless this beholding of their own image had made them sensible how matters are, and how they ought to be with them.

Such is the use and end of the word too. By comparing the contents of this with our own dispositions and actions, we may distinctly learn the state of our own souls. And as that is found to agree or to disagree with the will of God, we have there not only an opportunity of knowing ourselves, but a certain rule and model whereby to amend ourselves. They who will not look into this glass are not so much as hearers: they who look carelessly, and straightway forget their form, are the hearers without right application, and that practice which would certainly follow thereupon. For this is a glass that flatters none who are content to hold it fairly, and take the report it gives. A glass that men are sensible enough ought not to be held in vain. But then they are more entertained with the reflections of other people's visages than their own. You shall have them very acute in discovering their blemishes and imperfections, and recommending this correction upon their account; ingenious and ready to apply every smart thing they read, every sermon they hear, to their neighbours; and wonderfully pleased to think how such a one's picture hath been drawn to the life: but in all this they can find no likeness of, no concern for, any fault or failing in the proper place. Hence it is I mentioned a right application of the word: for this glass is intended to shew, not others to us, but every man to himself; to inform us what we are, in order to make us what we should be; not to divert us with the spots and deformities of our brethren, which is the certain way to keep us, nay, and to render us yet a great deal more what we should not be; for such false applicers and censurers are too busy abroad not to overlook that at home, which of all the rest stands in most need of being nicely looked into. And whoever they be that turn this glass another way, casting off all the discoveries made by it from themselves, and becoming judges of their brother's liberty and conscience, they are the very hypocrites reproved by our Lord for employing themselves about the mote in another's eye, without regarding the beam in their own. And, how religious soever they may seem, depend upon it, all their religion is vain.

And so is theirs likewise who reduce the Christian religion to a mere science, and place all perfection in reading and hearing and knowing the precepts of it: who measure their proficiency by the number of sermons they run about to attend, or the good books they are eager to peruse; or by the niceness of the points they are able to

argue upon: as if the word had done its business by filling the head, though it never influence the heart at all. A sort of understanding this, to which even ignorance itself, when honest and unaffected, is infinitely preferable. For so our Lord himself pronounced, *That servant, which know his master's will, and prepared not himself, neither did according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes; but he that know not, (that is, was not in a capacity of knowing,) and did commit things worthy of stripes, shall be beaten with few stripes.* Alas! it is action only that crowns all our studies. The word is of equal service and necessity for quickening and exciting us to what we already do, as for instructing us in what we do not yet understand. It is not said, *Happy are ye if ye know these things*, but, *If ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them.* In short, to be wise in spiritual matters, is no farther an advantage than as it disposes us to be good; for that alone is being *wise unto salvation.* And he, in the Christian sense, knows most, who leads his life best.

So great reason have all those well meaning people to be very jealous over their own hearts, who use a very commendable industry indeed in learning the precepts of this law. So much it concerns them to examine, by the marks laid down under my former head, what effect they feel upon their temper and behaviour: and whether, after so frequent and so zealous, I had almost said, such infinite hearing, they be not like the men of voracious appetites, who eat much and greedily, but digest and thrive by nothing. For such are oftentimes the keenest and devoutest hearers, deceived by the quantity they take in, and still hearers only. And therefore so seasonable and important is the petition of our church this day; *"That he, from whom all good things do come, would grant us, not only by his holy inspiration to think those things that be good, but by his merciful guiding to perform the same, through our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.*

THE FIFTH SUNDAY AFTER EASTER.

THE GOSPEL. St. John xvi. 23.

23 *Verily, verily, I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in my name, he will give it you.*

24 *Hitherto have ye asked nothing in my name: ask, and ye shall receive, that your joy may be full.*

25 *These things have I spoken unto you in proverbs: but the time cometh, when I shall no more speak unto you in proverbs, but I shall shew you plainly of the Father.*

will send) have a clear and perfect understanding of the will of God.

23. After my ascent into heaven, the most prevailing motive you can use in your prayers to God will be to ask for my sake.

24. This is yet a new form; but in the virtue of it you shall obtain whatsoever is good for you.

25. Some difficulties my discourses may have had, but the time is at hand, when you shall (by the help of the Holy Spirit whom I

^k Luke xi. 47, 48.

ⁱ John xiii. 17.

^m Collect.

26 *At that day ye shall ask in my name: and I say not unto you, that I will pray the Father for you:*

27 *For the Father himself loveth you, because ye have loved me, and have believed that I came out from God.*

28 *I came forth from the Father, and am come into the world: again, I leave the world, and go to the Father.*

29 *His disciples said unto him, Lo, now speakest thou plainly, and speakest no proverb.*

30 *Now are we sure that thou knowest all things, and needest not that any man should ask thee: by this we believe that thou comest forth from God.*

31 *Jesus answered them, Do ye now believe?*

32 *Behold, the hour cometh, yea, is now come, that ye shall be scattered, every man to his own, and shall leave me alone: and yet I am not alone, because the Father is with me.*

And yet I shall not be forsaken, for God will stand by me, and assert my truth and innocence.

33 *These things I have spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world.*

persecutions you are about to endure, by this reflection, that I have endured and conquered them before you.

30. This convinces us that thou art both able and willing to instruct men in all necessary truth, freely and of thy own accord.

31, 32. Alas, this faith of yours is not so firm as you think it: there is a terrible shock coming this very night, which not one of you will be able to sustain; but all will forsake me, and shift for themselves.

33. The design of every part of this discourse is to strengthen your dependence upon me; and to support you under the afflictions and

COMMENT.

Of several particulars in this Gospel worthy our consideration, the reader will find an account in some other parts of this work. Such are the ^acommand, the efficacy, and the duty of praying in the name of Christ: the ^bclearness of that knowledge which the disciples should receive when enlightened by the Holy Ghost: and the nature of that ^cpeace in God and Christ which good men enjoy, and which our blessed Saviour declares it was his intent by this whole discourse to promote and secure to his disciples. That therefore which I choose at present to insist upon is the very close of all in those words, *In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world.*

Upon this occasion I shall inquire, first, what is meant by *being of*

^a Gospel for St. Philip and James.

^c Ep. 4 S. in Adv.

^b Whit Sunday Gospel.

^d Ver. 13.

good cheer; and secondly, how the consideration of Christ having *overcome the world* is of service to cheer his followers under any tribulation which they shall have in it.

I. As to the former of these, I take it to be sufficiently explained by the three following remarks :

1. That the being of *good cheer* under *tribulation* does by no means infer that firmness of mind (as some philosophers of old miscalled it) which preserves the man from being at all affected with calamities or moved from his usual easiness of temper. How far human nature might be beholding to them who bestowed this fanciful perfection upon it, is not worth staying to examine : let it suffice to observe, that religion is not at all obliged by it ; for the gospel nowhere goes about to delude us with romantic notions : it tells no man upon a cross or in a fire that he feels no pain ; or that such pain is nothing to him, because it cannot reach his soul : and yet it commands every man to continue steadfast in his duty, notwithstanding the most exquisite tortures to deter him from it. It is entirely suited to the condition and common sense of mankind ; and would not require more constancy in suffering, if it did not furnish more substantial comforts, than any other system in the world. In short, Christianity leaves nature and its passions in the proper exercise of their powers ; offers no false ideas of things without us, which experience will be sure to prove false when we most need and wish to find them true ; but it allows the tenderest sense of pain and grief, and yet contrives a way to conquer that sense and sustain our spirits under the utmost weight of them.

2. This command to be of *good cheer* belongs to such *tribulation* only as the hand of God brings upon us. The sufferings of these disciples in propagating the faith seem to have been principally in our Lord's view at this time. And for these he had long since declared them blessed. But he had also directed them to join the *wisdom of the serpent with the harmlessness of the dove* ; and made prudence as well as perseverance in goodness a truly Christian duty. When therefore men court danger and draw upon themselves unnecessary sufferings, it is not the best cause nor the best meaning in the world that will bear such people out, or entitle them to the comforts of persecuted Christians. For these in truth do suffer, not for Christ's and righteousness' sake, but for their own humour and folly, the enthusiasm of a mistaken, or the heat of an indiscreet zeal.

The want of distinguishing rightly in matters of this kind gives rise to many mistakes of very ill consequence in the world. It disposes inconsiderate people to dislike, and furnishes those that affect to be popular with an occasion to censure too severely their laws and governors, when inflicting punishments upon men of differing persuasions for considerations purely civil : and it blows up the persons so punished with false notions of their own condition ; as if all the consolations and crowns promised to them that are martyrs indeed were now their due ; and this for sufferings in which, when matters are rightly stated, the cause of religion hath no part or concern at all. What those calami-

ties are which it is the will of God we should suffer, I have formerly endeavoured to help men in discovering. 'Under these we have reason to be of good cheer: but when we go out of the way of his providence, and, not content with *taking up our cross*, are fond of making it, we are thenceforth destitute of the true spiritual support, and must not think our Master worse than his word if we find ourselves extremely desolate and oppressed under our needless hardships, or voluntary and even laboured sorrows. But,

3. Though by *being of good cheer when we have tribulation*, be not meant, either that we should be insensible, or that we should be fond of it; yet thus much certainly is meant, that neither the sharpness of any affliction we feel, nor the terror of any we fear, should so far vanquish our reason and religion, as to drive us upon unlawful methods for declining the one or delivering ourselves from the other. We are to satisfy ourselves in the justice, the wisdom, the goodness of Him, who orders all our events to us; to entertain them all with meekness and much patience; to bring our will into subjection to the Divine will; to rejoice in the testimony of a good conscience, and preserve this at any rate, though with the hazard, nay, the certain loss of all our worldly advantages; and to set the supports and the rewards of persecuted truth or afflicted piety in opposition to all the discouragements and pressures from abroad, and all the frailties of feeble and too yielding flesh and blood at home. This is the *good cheer* our Lord requires, and hath himself contributed to by *overcoming the world*: a consideration which I shall now proceed to shew, in the

II. Second place, is of great service to all his followers under tribulation. The force of which argument will best appear by observing, first, how it is that Christ overcame the world, and then, which way that victory of his redounds to our advantage.

By *the world* in this passage we are no doubt to understand the evil of the world, the wickedness, the malice, the temptations, the troubles, all in it that we have reason to fear and flee from for the sake of our safety or our happiness in this and the next life.

Now the wickedness of the world Christ hath overcome by expiating the sins of mankind in the sacrifice of himself upon the cross; by the powerful assistances of his grace enabling all the faithful to conquer the passions of corrupt nature; and thus loosing the bands and releasing the captives of hell, and *breaking that old serpent's head*, whose attempts against him were so very vain as only to *bruise his heel*.

The malice of the world he overcame by disappointing the designs of the devil and his wicked instruments against himself and his gospel; making his own sufferings fatal to the contrivers, and saving to all penitent believers: and especially by the irresistible evidence of truth, subduing the spite and the cruelty, the calumny and cunning of the enemies of every sort, who by all manner of means conspired to suppress and extirpate his religion, and as many as should dare to preach or to profess it.

The temptations of the world he overcame by all that severe, but still social virtue and heavenly piety, which shone so bright in all his

conversation; and the troubles of it, by submitting to hunger and thirst, to poverty and grief, to live like the meanest, and to be treated like the worst of men. Nay, even death itself, our last and grimmeſt enemy, hath he overcome; *taken from this strong man the armour wherein he trusted, and divided his spoils.* To so total a rout hath he put his adversaries and ours. And the benefit of such achievements which accrues to us will soon appear, after having thus seen the nature of his victory, what foes they were he fought, and how he conquered them.

1. First then. This conquest is of great advantage to cheer our spirits in tribulation, as it gives us the comfort and encouragement of our blessed Saviour's example. When men feel themselves hard pressed, and are ready to sink under their burden, cowardice and sloth are apt to take sanctuary in the greatness of their trials, and the weakness of human nature to encounter with them. Now our Lord, in making himself a pattern of suffering evil, no less than of doing good, hath beat us off from this too common pretence. For he hath condescended to bear all the inseparable infirmities of human nature; and he hath done and suffered so much in this nature, as plainly proves that the rest who partake of it are capable of discharging their part, provided they would be resolute and sincere in doing all that human nature, assisted by grace, is really qualified for. Hence the apostle to the Hebrews makes so frequent mention of Christ being in all points *like unto us*, with respect to the frailties of this mortal state: and when exhorting Christians to *resist unto blood, striving against sin*, he directs them to *look unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, and to consider him that endured such contradiction of sinners against himself, lest they should be wearied and faint in their minds.*

2. Secondly. The victory obtained by Christ over the world is a mighty support to all his followers, if we consider the design of it and in what capacity it was that he won the day. The virtues of every good man are copies to write after, but there is one peculiarity in the example of Christ which that of no other person hath or can have. It is that the actions and sufferings of all besides were their own duty and tended to their own advantage, whereas his have nothing private in them, but all are public and of general influence: he was the common representative of us all; and as he was born and lived and died, so did he rise again and triumph and ascend into heaven for the sake and benefit of mankind: he fought the bloody field for us, and he conquered for us too: as his punishment of right was ours, and his sufferings ours, so his release, his deliverance, and his glory are ours also. And sure there is reason good why his victory should cheer us when our rights and interests are so interwoven with his as to convey to us a share and claim in all his undertakings and all his successes.

3. Thirdly. A farther encouragement arising from hence depends upon the manner of our Lord's *overcoming the world.* Now this was not done by preventing or escaping, but by enduring the tribulation of it. His followers therefore have no reason to take it amiss, if they be *conformed to the likeness of his sufferings*, and are led on to conquest by the same painful steps of patience and perseverance; for as the

exaltation of *the man Christ Jesus* receives lustre from the ignominy and torture of his death, so by making tribulation the lot of his disciples he hath added to their virtue and their honour. The assistance of his grace to carry them through their difficulties turns to better account, and is more for the credit of religion and its proselytes, than the keeping them clear of all difficulties could possibly have been. This might have left their virtue liable to suspicion, but that tries and distinguishes and publishes it to the world.

Thus I have shewed what supports we are provided with in the *fight of afflictions* appointed for us. A fight which leads to certain victory, unless we be treacherous to ourselves. Courage then, my brethren and fellow soldiers in Jesus; *watch ye, stand fast in the faith, quit ye like men, be strong.* Enter the lists boldly, and remember who brings you on; your Captain was himself made perfect through sufferings; let his example therefore provoke you to do gallantly; he is daily and hourly pouring in unseen recruits from above; fear not then, neither be dismayed, for more and mightier are they that be for us than all that are or can be against us. Nay, which is more, he is not only your leader, but your victorious and triumphant leader. You march against a baffled adversary, and should therefore act like men full of glorious hopes and great assurance. Do but dare to resist, and the enemy will flee from you; he knows our force through Christ that strengthens us, and remembers his past defeat, and feels his own weakness.

But why do I encourage you to fight, when, properly speaking, the battle is over? All you have left to do is to pursue and push your own advantage, to reap and wear the laurels which another hand hath won. For as our Lord did here declare that he had *overcome the world* already, though the great conflict of his bitter passion was not yet over, because he knew perfectly well what the issue of that conflict would be; so may every faithful servant of his be truly said to have overcome the world, as having done it with and in that Saviour who fought and conquered, not for himself, but them. To whom therefore, with the Father and the Holy Spirit, be all honour and glory, thanksgiving and praise, for ever and ever. Amen.

THE ASCENSION DAY.

THE COLLECT.

GRANT, we beseech thee, Almighty God, that like as we do believe thy only-begotten Son our Lord Jesus Christ to have ascended into the heavens^a; so we may also in heart and mind thither ascend, and with him continually dwell, who liveth and reigneth with thee and the Holy Ghost, one God, world without end. Amen.

^a Acts i; Mark xvi; Col. iii. 1, 2, &c.

THE EPISTLE. Acts i. 1.

1 *The former treatise have I made, O Theophilus, of all that Jesus began both to do and teach,*

2 *Until the day in which he was taken up, after that he through the Holy Ghost had given commandments unto the apostles whom he had chosen:*

3 *To whom also he shewed himself alive after his passion by many infallible proofs, being seen of them forty days, and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God:*

4 *And, being assembled together with them, commanded them that they should not depart from Jerusalem, but wait for the promise of the Father, which, saith he, ye have heard of me.*

5 *For John truly baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost not many days hence.*

6 *When they therefore were come together, they asked of him, saying, Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?*

7 *And he said unto them, It is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in his own power.*

8 *But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judæa, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth.*

9 *And when he had spoken these things, while they beheld, he was taken up; and a cloud received him out of their sight.*

10 *And while they looked steadfastly toward heaven, as he went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel;*

11 *Which also said, Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? this same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven.*

4. Conversing with them frequently during the interval between his resurrection and ascension.

5. John's baptism was with water only; but in ten days' time ye shall be consecrated to my service by the plentiful shedding of the Holy Ghost

6. Shall the Jews be gathered from their dispersion and captivity, and now again bear rule, as they expected to do, by the Messiah's means?

10. Two angels in the form of men,—

11. You look in vain after one who is not now to be seen; but he shall be seen again at the end of the world, coming then to judgment, as he now went from hence, in a bright cloud.

ASCENSION-DAY.

THE GOSPEL. St. Mark xvi. 14.

14 *Jesus appeared unto the eleven as they sat at meat, and upbraided them with their unbelief and hardness of heart, because they believed not them which had seen him after he was risen.*

15 *And he said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature.*

16 *He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned.*

of the covenant there made and continued in, be saved; and he that believes and would, but cannot, be so baptized, his case is the same: but he that wilfully and contemptuously refuses that faith shall be damned.

17 *And these signs shall follow them that believe; In my name shall they cast out devils; they shall speak with new tongues;*

18 *They shall take up serpents; and if they drink any deadly thing, it shall not hurt them; they shall lay hands on the sick, and they shall recover.*

19 *So then after the Lord had spoken unto them, he was received up into heaven, and sat on the right hand of God.*

20 *And they went forth, and preached every where, the Lord working with them, and confirming the word with signs following.*

15. Let the gospel not be confined, as the law was, to Judæa, but let all the nations partake of it.

16. He that believes, and solemnly professes that faith in baptism, shall, by virtue

COMMENT.

THE portion of scripture for the Epistle and that of the Gospel for this great and solemn day, do both agree in acquainting us how our Lord employed his last minutes with his disciples here upon earth, and how his blessed person was disposed of when ceasing to converse any longer among men. They relate that, by a fate very distant from that of common men, his body was not deposited in the grave, whose gates and strongholds he at his resurrection had already broken through, but that it was received up on high and conveyed into heaven. Thus far both passages agree; and then St. Mark adds, that he *sat on the right hand of God.*

These two glorious actions make the sixth article of our creed: each of which I shall first explain, and then make some reflections proper for the occasion of this festival.

I. In order to understand the former of these actions we shall do well to observe,

1. That when our Lord is affirmed to have been *received into heaven*, this must be understood of his human nature only; for the divine nature fills all places both in heaven and earth, and being incapable of that which we properly call local motion, it does this at all times too. Hence in his conversation with Nicodemus our Lord very emphatically styles himself, *The Son of man which is in heaven*. Now since the Scriptures treating of this matter do manifestly mean that Jesus ceased to be in the place where he was before, and began to be in a place where he was not before; that he remained no longer upon earth as he had for some time been, but removed into heaven where he had never been, as he hath since that time been; it follows that these passages cannot be understood of that nature in Christ which is infinite and omnipresent, but of that which is finite, and may be so in one place as not to continue in another. That is, of his human nature, and of this only.

2. The human nature consists in the union of soul and body, and with these the Divine nature of Christ is so joined as to make one person. Hence it appears that not only the human soul went up into heaven by holy and elevated thoughts; but that the same body of Christ which was born and suffered and died was actually carried up thither. And so our Saviour's ascension was no imaginary or figurative, but a real, proper, and corporal ascent into heaven.

3. Concerning the place whither he is gone much need not be said. For though the word *heaven* is used in different senses, and the thing distinguished into different regions; yet we can be under no reasonable doubt, whether upon this occasion we are not to interpret it of the loftiest and most glorious of all those regions. The Scriptures declare expressly that Christ is *passed through the heavens*, that he is *made higher than the heavens*, and that he *ascended up far above all heavens*. Consequently that his human nature is *received up into heaven*, in the most elevated part and noblest signification that this word at any time does or can possibly admit.

But that is not all. So great a degree of honour and felicity is vouchsafed to the blessed angels, that *they always behold the face of Christ's Father which is in heaven*. Notwithstanding which, the author to the Hebrews observes that God never said to any of those glorious spirits, *Sit thou on my right hand*. This is a preeminence reserved for the Son only, and that which comes now in the

II. Second place to be considered. Now the expression of *sitting on God's right hand* is one of those wherein the Holy Ghost condescends to our capacities, by attributing to God the parts and gestures of a human body. The hand is the chief instrument of exerting our strength, and therefore often used to denote the power of God. The right hand is the usual place of honour and respect, and therefore this denotes the highest dignity. And as the most honourable upon earth are distinguished by the nearest approach to the person of the king, so it

^b Psalm lxxiii. 4; 2 Cor. xii. 2; Dent. x. 14; Psalm viii. and cxlviii. 4.

^c Heb. iv. 14. vii. 26; Ephes. iv. 10.

^d Matt. xviii. 10.

^e Heb. i. 13.

was the ambition of the two sons of Zebedee, *“to sit, the one on Christ's right hand, and the other on his left in his kingdom.”*

In like manner, by *sitting* is not, in the case before us, strictly intended any posture of the body, but the things usually implied by that posture. Thus the prophet intimates the profound ease and fearless tranquillity of his people by promising that they should *“sit every man under his own vine.”* And thus the Saviour of the world may be said to *sit down* on the right hand of God, as he now hath ceased from the labours and sufferings undergone *“in the days of his flesh,”* and enjoys perfect repose and happiness with his Father in heaven.

Sitting again implies continuance in the same place. From whence the tribes whose lot fell out there in the division of the promised land are said to *sit by the seashore.* And thus our Saviour's *sitting* on the right hand of God denotes his constant abode in those regions of bliss and glory: which agrees with St. Peter's declaration to the Jews, that *“the heavens must receive Jesus Christ until the times of restitution, or final consummation, of all things.”*

Sitting, once more, imports authority and dominion. Hence kings are represented in this posture upon their thrones, and magistrates use it in courts of justice. And thus Christ is described *sitting* on the right hand of God, to intimate that mediatory kingdom and universal power, which, as God-man, he is now invested with. Hither we must refer those magnificent accounts given by our Lord himself. That to the high priest: *“Hereafter shall ye see the Son of man sitting on the right hand of power;”* and that to his disciples in this day of his inauguration, *“All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth.”* And by St. Paul, when he acquaints the Corinthians that he *“must reign till he have put all enemies under his feet;”* and the Ephesians, that *“God hath set Christ at his own right hand in the heavenly places: far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come: and hath put all things under his feet, and gave him to be the head over all things to the church.”* Thus, lastly, St. Peter affirms, that Jesus Christ *“is gone into heaven, and is on the right hand of God, angels and authorities and powers being made subject unto him.”*

Thus much I conceive may suffice for establishing a right notion of that article of our Christian faith contained in the Scriptures appointed for this day. The sum whereof will be comprehended in these very few words: That the same bliss and glory and power which the Son of God did before his incarnation enjoy with his Father from all eternity, his human nature is made partaker of in the highest heavens. That this God-man is invested with an absolute authority and boundless dominion, and does now in both natures rule, as he shall one day judge, the whole world; that till that day come, it is the duty of us and all mankind to reverence and obey, to trust in and pray to him as our only Head and King, our rightful and universal Lord. This is the substance of that which we are to understand by Jesus Christ *being received up into heaven, and sitting at the right hand of God.*

^c Matt. xx. 21—23. ^f Micah iv. 4. ^g Heb. v. 7; Judges v. 17. ^h Acts iii. 21.
ⁱ Mark xiv. 62. ^k Matt. xxiii. 18. ^l 1 Cor. xv. 25. ^m Ephes. i. 20, 21, 22. ⁿ 1 Peter iii. 22.

II. I proceed now, in the second place, to lay down some reflections and uses proper to be made by every Christian from the doctrine thus explained.

1. And first. Our Saviour's ascent into heaven administers unspeakable comfort and great degrees of confidence with regard to the capacity in which he ascended thither.

The author to the *Hebrews* takes notice that this action of our Lord was typified under the old law by the high priest entering into the holy of holies on the solemn day of atonement, whither also he brought in the blood of the sacrifice. Now this was done, not upon the high priest's account alone, but in behalf of the whole congregation, whose representative he then was, and for whose benefit the sin-offering had been slain. Thus also Christ, the substance and antitype of that ancient figure, is *entered into places not made with hands*, even into *heaven itself*, for this very purpose, (says the apostle,) *now to appear in the presence of God for us*. Hence we have leave to look on this ascent, not merely as a private and personal advantage, but as performed under that public character which Christ sustained in the quality of our great high priest. And as the sacrifice of his death was accepted for *the sins of many*, so the representation of that sacrifice at his ascension does likewise affect and extend to as many as are purged and pardoned by it. He went up therefore before us, and he went up for us. From whence the same apostle mentions, as an *anchor of our hope both sure and steadfast*, that *Jesus the forerunner is entered for us within the veil*. Now a forerunner is a relative term, and of necessity must have regard to some persons following behind. A better application whereof we cannot have than that made by our Lord himself, when comforting his disciples for his departure from them: *"In my Father's house are many mansions; I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also."*

2. Let us upon this occasion contemplate and admire the wonderful wisdom and equity of God in receiving the human nature of his blessed Son to his right hand in heaven. It is indeed a most glorious privilege for flesh and blood to sit in heavenly places. But when we remember that this was the flesh and blood which the eternal Son of God condescended to honour with his personal residence; that in this he laboured under all the wants and infirmities, the contumelious treatment and bitter agonies which he submitted to, but could not undergo, except as man; we then may easily discern great reason for a recompense as extraordinary as the sufferings had been, and cannot suppose any amends too much for such exquisite tortures and barbarous indignities. As no sorrow was ever like his sorrow, so was no joy ever so full, no honour ever so excellent. And to this account we find St. Paul placing it in his second to the *Philippians*. Which passage having formerly been handled at large, I forbear prosecuting the argument of it now. Meanwhile the scandal of the cross was effectually removed by seating

¹ Heb. ix. x. See Epist. Wedn. and Friday before Easter.

^m Heb. vi. 19, 20.

ⁿ John xiv. 2.

^o Epist. Sunday before Easter.

the body crucified upon the throne on high, and constituting that once mock king the Lord and Judge of the whole earth.

3. Lastly, this ascent and session of our blessed Master at God's right hand lays upon all his followers the strongest obligation to be heavenly-minded. He is said to have *endured* in prospect of *the joy* to follow; and we, like him, should keep our eyes as much as may be fixed upon that joy. For how shall we ever love what we do not desire? And how shall we desire what we do not value? And how shall we learn to value what we never bestow any thought upon? Now the glories of heaven want no true worth to recommend them; there only needs serious meditation to render them more familiar and present to our minds. For the better we grow acquainted with these things, the more ardently we shall be sure to love and thirst and pant after them. Let us therefore remember we are Christians; that our Lord and Leader is gone far above out of our sight; that we are still able to follow him with the eye of faith; that our true blessedness consists in being with him; that our main concern lies in another country; and that the affairs of this in which we now sojourn are allowed in some measure to employ our pains, but by no means to possess our hearts. In short, completely happy we cannot be till we arrive at those blissful mansions whither our Saviour Christ is gone before: but the nearest approach to happiness possible to be made by us in the mean while is *in heart and mind thither to ascend, and with him continually dwell*. For this we must labour, for this we must implore the assistance of his grace: and O *Thou that sittest at the right hand of God, have mercy upon us: Thou that sittest at the right hand of God, receive our prayer. For thou only art holy; thou only art the Lord; thou only, O Christ, with the Holy Ghost, art most high in the glory of God the Father.* Amen.

SUNDAY AFTER ASCENSION-DAY.

THE COLLECT.

O God the King of glory, who hast exalted thine only Son Jesus Christ with great triumph unto thy kingdom in heaven; We beseech thee, leave us not comfortless^a; but send to us thine Holy Ghost to comfort us, and exalt us unto the same place whither our Saviour Christ is gone before, who liveth and reigneth with thee and the Holy Ghost, one God, world without end. Amen.

^a Heb. xii. 3.

^a Collect.

^c Communion Service.

^a Acts i; Phil. ii.

THE EPISTLE. 1 St. Peter iv. 7.

7 *The end of all things is at hand : be ye therefore sober, and watch unto prayer.*

8 *And above all things have fervent charity among yourselves : for charity shall cover the multitude of sins.*

the pardon of your own sins from him, or it will pass over many sins in others, and so preserve peace and kindness among you.

9 *Use hospitality one to another without grudging.*

10 *As every man hath received the gift, even so minister the same one to another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God.*

11 *If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God ; if any man minister, let him do it as of the ability which God giveth : that God in all things may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom be praise and dominion for ever and ever. Amen.*

7. Compare St. Luke xxi.

34. 35. 36.

8. Your charity to others will incline the mercy of God, and be a means to procure

COMMENT.

By the *end of all things*, mentioned at the seventh verse, we shall do well to understand that day of the Lord whose terrors are described in the xxivth of St. Matthew and the xxist of St. Luke^a ; both which scriptures have been already considered in the course of this work. A revolution of that infinite consequence, that the utmost preparation possible to be made for it is all little enough ; and a revolution so uncertain, as to the time when it shall overtake us, that our Lord, upon all occasions taken to mention it, inculcates the great duty of watchfulness ; a duty incapable of being discharged by any who have not attained to a mastery over their sensual appetites : the indulging whercof to any degree of excess clouds the reason that it cannot, and indisposes the mind to every thing serious, that it hath no inclination to consider and keep awake, and provide itself against the surprises of its spiritual enemy. His temptations can at no time attack us with more fatal advantage than when unlawful liberties and pleasures have put us off our guard : and if this be our danger in every common event of life, how much more dreadful is it with regard to our end, in which whatever we suffer is final, and incapable of any reparation ! Most seasonably therefore does the apostle here press the duty of sobriety ; and in regard the strength and succour of the very best men is not from themselves, most reasonably does he add *watching unto prayer*. Thus treading in the steps of our blessed Saviour, who on the like occasion gives the following warning ; *Take heed to yourselves, lest at any time your hearts be overcharged with surfeiting, and*

^a Gosp. 2 S. Adv. 6 S. after Ephph.

drunkenness, and cares of this life, and so that day come upon you unawares. For as a snare shall it come on all them that dwell on the face of the whole earth. Watch ye therefore, and pray always, that ye may be accounted worthy to escape all those things that shall come to pass, and to stand before the Son of man^b. The only remarks I would leave this particular with are, (1.) that by comparing our Lord and St. Peter together, it appears that *sobriety* means, not only what we call a temperate use of meats and drinks and pleasures and recreations, and the like, but also a moderating our desires and pursuits in the business and advantages of the world. And (2.) that there is a mutual suberviency of these virtues to each other: sobriety is necessary to qualify a man for devotion, and prayer as useful to preserve and confirm us in the love of sobriety.

At the eighth verse he does not only recommend charity in a very extraordinary degree, but enforces his exhortation with an argument exceeding proper, in whether soever of those two constructions we take it which I have expressed in my paraphrase of those words. The power of this argument, in the former sense, will make the subject of a discourse ^chereafter: that of the latter is explained in St. Paul's character of charity, appointed for the Epistle on Quinquagesima Sunday.

The duties that follow, to the end of this Epistle, the reason of obliging to them, at the tenth, and the end or view they ought to be directed to, at the eleventh verse, have had their due enlargement heretofore; particularly upon the Epistles for the third Sunday in Advent and the second after Epiphany.

SUNDAY AFTER ASCENSION-DAY.

THE GOSPEL. St. John xv. 26, and part of the xvth chapter.

26 *When the Comforter is come, whom I will send unto you from the Father, even the Spirit of truth, which proceedeth from the Father, he shall testify of me:* 26. When that Spirit, who is to discharge the office of a Paraclete, who is a spirit of truth, sent by me, and sent from the Father: when he, I say, is come, as very shortly he will, the miraculous gifts and graces he shall endue you with will be a glorious testimony of my innocence and doctrine.

27 *And ye also shall bear witness, because ye have been with me from the beginning.* 27. To that testimony of his, you shall add your own; because conversing with me ever since I entered on my prophetic office, your knowledge of all my actions and sufferings renders you competent and unexceptionable witnesses in this cause.

1 *These things have I spoken unto you, that ye should not be offended.* 1. These sufferings I forewarned you of, and these comforts I have promised, to prevent your falling away from your

^b Luke xxi. 34, 35, 36.

^c Gospel for S. 22 after Trinity.

profession, by either the surprise or the extremity of any affliction that may befall you.

2 *They shall put you out of the synagogues : yea, the time cometh, that whosoever killeth you will think that he doeth God service.*

2. The Jews shall cast you out of their communion, and Jews and Gentiles both shall be transported with so fierce a zeal, as to think the shedding your blood an act of merit, a sacrifice acceptable to God.

3 *And these things will they do unto you, because they have not known the Father, nor me.*

3. But all this cruelty is the effect of their blindness, and not being sensible how

4 *But these things have I told you, that when the time shall come, ye may remember that I told you of them.*

4. When thus it happens, the events will convince you of my truth in foretelling your sufferings ; and ought by the same reason to support you with a belief, that the comforts and reward, promised at the same time, shall be found equally true.

COMMENT.

THE Gospel for this day is a seasonable introduction to the festival now approaching ; and suggests sundry observations, the rest of which I shall reserve for that solemnity, and at present insist only on the office of the Holy Ghost, set forth under the notion of *Paraclete*, which we render Comforter. Now this, in the due extent of the original, implies three things ; all exceeding proper for the circumstances of the disciples at that time.

That good office is here intimated, as I said, in the title of *Comforter*. A translation which seems to have been chosen, chiefly in regard of those inward consolations which the disciples appear plainly to have found in the very sharpest of their troubles by the accession of this blessed Spirit. Or also it might respect an old usage of the word which still remains in forms of law ; where by *comforting* is understood any sort of abetting, strengthening, upholding, standing by, and taking part with another. Thus it will answer the extent of the word *Paraclete*. Which is a term that hath relation to courts and proceedings at law, and will deserve a little of our attention for getting light into the passages where Christ promised to send the Holy Spirit in this capacity.

1. Now first. The sense of *Comforter*, according to its modern and most obvious acceptation, imports, no doubt, one very considerable branch of the Holy Spirit's office. Such as the present circumstances of those disciples did, to be sure, stand in very great need of. They were left destitute of their Master's conversation ; not only so, but they were left now the marks of all that hatred and malice which hitherto had fallen upon him. They were commanded to expect great variety of sufferings and unrelenting barbarity on all hands. And sure this state called for some more than ordinary powers to sustain and confirm their hearts under it, and reconcile them to the certain

hardships which their duty and character would daily expose them to. Now this was to be done by supplying them with heavenly and unseen succours; by those recruits overpowering the temptations that threatened their overthrow, and reinforcing a nature, otherwise too weak and frail to stand the shock of so much terror and danger, so continual sorrow and merciless persecution. In all these regards the Holy Ghost exerted his divine influences, and did really approve himself in the most eminent manner and most literal sense a *Comforter*.

2. The word *Paraclete* does also denote an intercessor. And of this Spirit St. Paul says, that *he maketh intercession for the saints with groanings which cannot be uttered, and according to the will of God*. This some understand of his personal mediation before the throne of heaven, by virtue whereof our prayers are rendered acceptable. Others, of those graces by which he prepares and disposes the hearts of good men to pray in such a manner, with a zeal so fervent, with a will so resigned to the providence and wisdom of God, as never fails of acceptance and success. Either way the title of *Paraclete* belongs to him. It being then customary, and part of the advocate's duty, to draw up the petitions and representations of his clients, to prefer them in court, to use his intercal on their behalf, and with great industry to recommend them and their cause to persons of authority and power.

The sum then of the *Paraclete's* business, in this second notion, was, to procure favour and access for those who had not the advantages of making their own way. And thus we, of ourselves most unworthy and vile, stand in need of the mediations of our Saviour and his blessed Spirit, to present our petitions, and give us countenance in our approaches to the Majesty on high. It is this appearance on our behalf that must justify our addresses, and render that a throne of grace and love, of gentleness and pity, of clemency and condescension. For otherwise it would be inaccessible; a seat of judgment and stern justice; a place at which no man's application could find favourable entertainment; because, if God should be *extreme to mark what is done amiss* by the very best of men, no flesh living could be justified in his sight. So necessary was it, even for the apostles, so much more necessary is it for us miserable sinners, to enjoy the benefits and kind offices of this heavenly *Paraclete*, according to the second notion of that title, as it denotes an intercessor.

3. There is yet a third and very considerable one employed in assisting clients in the pleading of their cause. And this, not by arguing the whole point for them, (as with us is now most usual,) but by instructing the party himself in arguments proper for him to urge in his own defence. This was done by conferring frequently together, preparing allegations beforehand, and at the day of hearing encouraging him to speak boldly, suggesting proper matter, and prompting him with so much care and prudence that nothing material or useful should slip him. Of this assistance the apostles had very great need: they were entering into controversy with a whole world at once. A controversy which, so far as their own endowments, natural or acquired, were concerned, they, of all men breathing, were least qualified to manage or

maintain. Upon this account our Lord commands them to rely entirely upon the wisdom and watchfulness of a heavenly monitor: one who would not fail them in their greatest extremities; but, without any study or eloquence of their own, be sure to order matters so that they should come off with honour, and their enemies with shame and confusion. Thus in effect it was, and thus our Lord declared it should be: *Ye shall be brought before governors and kings for a testimony against them and the Gentiles. But when they deliver you up, take no thought how or what ye shall speak; for it shall be given you in that same hour what ye shall speak.* Or as St. Luke hath it, *For I will give you a mouth and wisdom, which all your adversaries shall not be able to gainsay nor resist.*

And for their being so much above the power of contradiction, our Lord himself assigns this very cause; *For it is not you that speak, but the Spirit of my Father which speaketh in you.*

And such effects as these were the testimony which the Spirit is said to bear concerning Christ: extraordinary gifts and powers plainly supernatural, and of divine original. These were the reasonable, the most effectual instruments of perfecting the faith of the apostles themselves, and of creating and confirming it in the persons taught by them. To these St. Paul applies that of the psalmist, *Thou art gone up on high, thou hast led captivity captive, and given gifts unto men.* So making the liberal effusions of those days answer the distributions usual at the solemn inaugurations and triumphs of princes. And such was the glorious entry made by our Lord into heaven: a solemnizing his conquest over death and hell, and every enemy; a taking full and quiet possession of his throne and kingdom. Of that enthroning, the Holy Ghost, shed abroad according to his promise, was a convincing demonstration. An instance of his truth and boundless power by whom it was given: and an evidence how dear those persons and that cause were to God, in vindication whereof it was in so plentiful and astonishing a manner received: and consequently how safely all their doctrines and reports might be depended upon, who brought such credentials of their veracity.

The following part of this day's Gospel offers a fair occasion for shewing the simfulness and danger of mistaken zeal, and those violent methods it is apt to run men upon. A very profitable, and but too seasonable a subject, had not the necessity of treating it here been superseded by what hath already occurred to my reader upon the Gospel for St. Stephen's day.

WIIIT-SUNDAY.

THE COLLECT.

GOD, who as at this time didst teach the hearts of thy faithful people, by the sending to them the light of thy Holy Spirit^a;

^c Matt. x; Luke xxi.

^f Luke xxi. 16.

^e Matt. x. 20.

^h Ephes. iv. 8.

^a Acts ii. 3; ⁱ Cor. ii. 15.

Grant us by the same Spirit to have a right judgment in all things, and evermore to rejoice in his holy comfort; through the merits of Christ Jesus our Saviour, who liveth and reigneth with thee, in the unity of the same Spirit, one God, world without end. Amen.

THE blessing commemorated at this festival is at large set forth in the service proper for it, and will fall under consideration in the treatises on the several portions of Scripture appointed for the Epistles and Gospels. Meanwhile, for the instruction of the vulgar reader, I would take notice of the reason of this title, which in our language it most commonly goes by, that of Whit-Sunday.

The most received notion is, that the word is at length *White-Sunday*; so called from the white garments worn by the persons baptized in the ancient church. For the administering of which sacrament, Easter, and this, and the Sundays between, were the most solemn seasons. Particularly on this day, the last of those Sundays, when that solemnity determined, and the preparation for it had been extended to the utmost length; as well on that account as for the deserved veneration due to so great a festival, vast numbers offered themselves to be received to baptism. And in token of their being cleansed from all past sins, as well as for an emblem of that innocence and purity to which they then obliged themselves, they were clad in white, and, from the multitude of such vestments then put on, are supposed to have given occasion for this Lord's day being distinguished by that name.

It is true, the Sunday next after Easter was anciently styled *Dominica in Albis*, on this very occasion, which an ingenious^b author of our nation hath observed to be in appearance less proper than *Dominica post Albas*. That referring to the white garments put on by persons baptized on Easter-day, but worn usually for seven days; and therefore, according to the custom then obtaining, laid aside the eighth, that is, the Lord's day following. He there interposes his conjecture, that this might be called and written heretofore *Whit-Sunday*, that is, the eighth. For so it is in order, reckoning Easter-day the first, which was anciently esteemed so among the Christian, as the passover, to which it answers, had been among Jewish solemnities.

Let this suffice for the common appellation of the day; to take a short notice whereof is sufficient, but to criticise too long or too nicely upon it would detain us from matters more substantial and edifying, to which I now proceed.

FOR THE EPISTLE. Acts ii. 1.

1 And when the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place.

1. On the fiftieth day after the passover, and feast of unleavened bread, called

^b Hammond L'Estrange, Alliances of Divine Offices.

for that reason the Pentecost, the disciples were met together to solemnize the feast of weeks, or feast of harvest. So called, because just seven weeks after the sabbath of the former (which was the first, as this was the second) great festival of the Jews, wherein all the males were commanded to appear before the Lord, to offer the first-fruits of their second, or wheat harvest ^b.

2 *And suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting.*

3 *And there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them.*

4 *And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance. things as the Spirit dictated, in different languages, which they had never learnt.*

5 *And there were dwelling at Jerusalem Jews, devout men, out of every nation under heaven.*

6 *Now when this was noised abroad, the multitude came together, and were confounded, because that every man heard them speak in his own language. them, in the language proper to the several places where each of the hearers was born or dwelt.*

7 *And they were all amazed and marvelled, saying one to another, Behold, are not all these which speak Galileans?*

8 *And how hear we every man in our own tongue wherein we were born?*

9 *Parthians, and Medes, and Elamites, and the dwellers in Mesopotamia, and in Judæa, and Cappadocia, in Pontus, and Asia,*

10 *Phrygia, and Pamphylia, in Egypt, and in the parts of Libya about Cyrene, and strangers of Rome, Jews and proselytes,*

11 *Cretes and Arabians, we do hear them speak in our tongues the wonderful works of God.*

2. While they were thus assembled, an unusual sound was heard from heaven, like that of a strong wind.

3. And upon each of the disciples a form seen to rest, like that of a cloven tongue for shape, and bright like fire.

4. Whereupon they were all inspired by the Holy Ghost, and delivered such

5. There being then at Jerusalem on the account of celebrating this festival, people the Jews had been scattered.

6. This event drew vast numbers together, who were all astonished to hear these disciples apply themselves to

7. This surprise they could not forbear to express, as follows.

COMMENT.

This scripture relates one of the most important events that ever happened to mankind. For such was the mission of the Holy Spirit,

^b Exod. xxiii; Lev. xxiii; Deut. xvi.

and the pouring out his miraculous gifts upon the disciples in a manner most amazing, most effectual for the mighty purposes appointed to be accomplished by their means. An event deservedly commemorated by the Christian church, since the influence of it extends to all ages; and the benefit consequent upon it is no less than the conversion and instruction of a whole world. Upon this occasion first that power from on high exerted itself, wherewith our Lord promised to endue those delegates to whom he had committed the care of finishing the great work, which, though begun by himself, was to be carried on by other hands. And the circumstances that concurred to give authority and efficacy to their undertaking are too weighty to be neglected in a discourse upon it. Such in particular are the time, the place, the surprising appearances of this Spirit's descent; all of great significance and consideration; though such more especially indeed were the immediate effects it produced, and the condition of the persons so powerfully wrought upon by it. To each of these my design is to say something in such proportion as the proper measure of this discourse will allow.

1. I begin with the time expressed in those words, *“When the day of Pentecost was fully come.”* The day of Pentecost is the *“fiftieth day;”* for so this was of the Jewish year, the supputation whereof, by God's express command, began from the feast of the passover and unleavened bread. Concerning the Pentecost we read this ordinance: *“Ye shall count unto you from the morrow after the sabbath, from the day that ye brought the sheaf of the wave-offering, seven sabbaths shall be complete: even unto the morrow after the seventh sabbath shall ye number fifty days, and ye shall offer a new meat-offering unto the Lord.”* Hence, from the seven weeks' interval, this was called *“the feast of weeks;”* and it is the second of those three great solemnities in which all the males of Israel were strictly enjoined to *“appear before the Lord”* in the place that he should choose. As therefore on the former of these feast days, that of first-fruits and unleavened bread, Christ, *“the first-fruits of them that slept,”* arose from the dead; so in the latter part or morning of the second feast, the Holy Ghost descended on the disciples. The fiftieth day, (according to the Jews, who begin to reckon from sunset,) at the *“third hour”* of the vulgar day, (or nine in the morning,) being thus (as St. Luke emphatically speaks) *“fully come,”* and drawing toward a conclusion. I add, that on this day the Jews were commanded to offer the *“first-fruits of their second or wheat-harvest;”* as in the former festival they did those of their first or barley harvest, called upon that account *“the time when they began to put their sickle to the corn;”* from whence the computation of seven weeks was to commence.

The precise time of the Holy Ghost's descent thus explained will furnish us with these following remarks:

1. That Jerusalem now being full with persons from all quarters, obliged to resort thither upon a religious account, this gave the greater opportunity for an event so extraordinary being more generally ob-

^a Ver. 1.

^d Exod. xii. 2.

^e Levit. xxiii. 15, 16.

^f Deut. xvi. 9.

^g Ibid. ver. 16; Exod. xxxiv. 23; xxiii. 17.

^h 1 Cor. xvi. 26.

ⁱ Ver. 15.

^k Exod. xxiii. 16.

^l Deut. xvi. 9, 10.

served, more nicely examined, more speedily published abroad through the many and distant regions whither the people now assembled would shortly disperse themselves. Not only so, but by thus timing the matter, those very persons, who, at the last great feast, had been eyewitnesses of our Lord's sufferings and shame, would have now the same evidence of his truth and glory, by those powers of the Spirit conferred, and those miracles wrought in his name, at their attendance on this second festival, as were an overbalance to the scandal of his cross. And what can in reason make more for the truth of this miracle, than that it offered itself so openly to the judgment of multitudes of people, in their present persuasion violently bent against the doctrines it was intended to establish? Surely, as one of the Gospels for this holy season argues, a more convincing mark there cannot be of any one's *doing the truth*, than his *coming thus to light, that his deeds may be made manifest that they are wrought in God^m*.

2. It is observable, secondly, that the foundation of those Jewish festivals is laid in some very valuable mercy, the preserving a grateful remembrance whereof was one, probably the principal end of their institution. Thus the passover was a ^a yearly commemoration of their coming out of Egypt; that of ^b tabernacles, of their sojourning safely in the wilderness; and this of weeks, of their receiving the law in mount Sinai, the fiftieth day exactly after their getting quit of the Egyptian bondage. Thus, as the time of Christ's death and resurrection corresponded with that of killing the passover and offering the first-fruits; so did the coming of the Holy Ghost to publish the new and evangelical, comport with the day of God's proclaiming the old, law. And as then too the first-fruits of the second harvest were brought, then in like manner did God increase and crown the attainments of these disciples under the conduct of his Son, by pouring upon them the ^c *first-fruits of the Spirit*; and by enabling them to bring him the same day an offering of ^d *three thousand souls*, a noble first-fruits of the converts won by their preaching. Meanwhile, this agreement manifestly proves that the same God instituted both the ^e law and the gospel, that his church is one and the same under both dispensations. With this only difference, that the former was its more imperfect and weak, the latter its more improved and mature state. And consequently, that it betrays too wretched either ignorance or perverseness to admit no correspondence between Jewish and Christian institutions in any case; or to imagine that, when the typical part ceased, and gave place to the substance, all the rest of those usages, which had not the like view and import, were condemned and exploded as carnal and unlawful.

3. I observe once more, that this miracle fell out on the first day of the week. Of which no doubt can remain, since we are told so often that upon that day our Lord rose from the dead, the fiftieth from whence inclusive will of necessity be the first likewise; which I mention to shew what reason the apostles then, and the church ever since, had to make this the day of solemn worship. Let me say rather, what reason they had to conclude that God had made it so to Christians, when his wise

^m John iii. 21. ^a Exod. xii. ^b Levit. xxiii. 43; Exod. xix. 1; Maim. de More Nev. p. 112. c. 43. ^c Rom. viii. 23. ^d Acts ii. 41. ^e Leo. Serm. i. de Pent.

providence so ordered matters, that the old Jewish sabbath, the seventh day, should be passed over; and this first made choice of to be honoured with two such glorious miracles as the resurrection of our blessed Lord from the dead, and the coming of the Holy Ghost from heaven: the one to justify, the other to enlighten and sanctify; the former to finish and prove, the other to proclaim and qualify us for salvation.

II. The next circumstance proper to be taken notice of in this affair is the place where it was done. 'This, speaking more at large, we are assured was Jerusalem. Here the feast was by the law to be kept; from hence the disciples were forbidden to depart till they should receive this promise of the Father; and hither the confluence of the vast numbers who saw, and believed, and attested to it, are said to have been. Nay, here it must needs have been; for so the accomplishment of ancient prophecies required, importing a prodigious and most happy enlargement of God's church, to set out from hence; *'For the law shall go forth of Zion, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem.*

But, in a more confined sense, the place of this miracle was a room, where the disciples were gathered together. Most interpreters incline to think it that mentioned in the "first chapter, whither they retired after our Lord's ascension. But none, I think, have questioned the occasion of their meeting to have been for the exercise of piety and devotion: which is certainly a good intimation that the duties of religion are the best expedient for inviting the Spirit of God; that prayer is necessary, not only to obtain, but to prepare us for his divine influences; that the assemblies of the saints are the places he delights to frequent, and is most likely to be found in; and that this Spirit of love and order and unity bestows his gifts most bountifully where the servants of Christ are assembled, not in *one place* only, but also *with one accord*. For the author of peace cannot be a favourer of discord and confusion; and therefore, how loudly soever some who disturb the peace and divide the members of the church may boast of his gifts and uncommon favours, we have great reason to suspect that such bold pretences to the Spirit are empty and unfaithful; studied impostures upon others, or dangerous delusions upon themselves.

III. I come now to consider, in the third place, the remarkable and surprising appearances of this Holy Spirit's descent upon the apostles.

The nature of man is such, that in this mortal state, those things that enter by and strongly affect the outward, come best prepared to make due impression upon the inward man. Hence upon all extraordinary manifestations of himself, God hath been wont to make use of some sensible representations; the better to convey into the minds of his servants such ideas as they were chosen and naturally adapted to awaken there. Such were the circumstances of the Holy Spirit's mission at this time. Each very significant of the inward operations which the apostles then, and others in proportion afterwards, were to expect upon receiving him into their hearts.

1. The first of these is described by *a sudden sound from heaven, as of a rushing mighty wind, which filled all the house where they were sitting.*

The suddenness of this sound, and the point of direction whence it came, were of use to strike an awe upon the persons, and prepare them with more profound humility and reverence to receive the approaches God was making toward them. And the resemblance of wind is of all others most familiar in Scripture to figure the Spirit of God, his powers and his effects. What can indeed be more proper to represent the freedom of his grace, and at the same time the power of its operation, than *the wind, which bloweth where it listeth, and the sound whereof we hear, though we cannot tell whence it cometh and whither it goeth*? What those refreshing, cleansing influences, which fill and penetrate, and move the hearts of men, which raise a new and happy ferment there, and lift them up to heaven by infusing pious dispositions, than wind, which, like that Spirit, is in itself invisible, wonderful and unaccountable in the manner of its working, but in its force and efficacy notorious and undeniable? So great affinity there is between the natural and spiritual creation, between the rude undigested matter of the one, and the impotence and indisposition of our minds in the other. So hath this Spirit of God in each case moved upon the face of the deep, and formed it into order and capacity for such productions as he who made them may see and pronounce very good.

2. The next thing observable is the appearance of *cloven tongues*, sitting on the heads of these disciples; by which was figured the ability given to them to accommodate themselves to hearers of all nations, not in one or two, but in as many languages as might render what they delivered intelligible to all they had occasion to treat with. The diversity of the languages was intimated by the clefts in these tongues; as the readiness and aptness of their expressions and arguments was by the tongues themselves. And possibly the sitting of these tongues might signify that this was no such transient effect as should immediately vanish, but such as was allowed to continue, and to be by their ministry diffused and communicated to others, so long as the necessities of the church and the propagation of the Christian faith should require it. Thus it pleased God, who introduced variety of languages as a curse and punishment of man's sin and rebellion, and in great measure a cause of ignorance and confusion in the world, by a turn of events peculiar to Him whose prerogative it is to bring good out of evil and light out of darkness, to render the same variety an instrument of the quickest attaining to the best knowledge, a powerful motive to obedience, and a means of establishing the most perfect order and happiness of mankind.

3. A farther remark offers itself upon this occasion, which is, that these tongues had the resemblance of fire. And a very fit resemblance this was of the light these disciples received by the accession of the Holy Spirit; the clear unerring knowledge they attained of all things that it concerned persons in that high character and weighty trust perfectly to understand. The forcible arguments, as well as the intelligible expressions, requisite to convince, to instruct, to awaken, to win over the mistaken, the ignorant, the insensible, the prejudiced

world. So was it of that zeal and fearless courage which now, like fire, had spread itself into their hearts, and kindled such a vital and vigorous heat there, that from henceforth we hear no more of any of them trembling at the charge of belonging to Jesus, denying their Lord, or assembling privately, and with doors shut; but putting themselves forward industriously, preaching and working miracles boldly in the temple, the synagogues, the streets, confronting councils and courts of justice publicly, ^bdeclaring that, whatever were the consequences, they must and would speak what they had seen and heard; and when treated as malefactors upon this account, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer for the sake and name of a crucified Master. So perfectly had this divine fire seized upon every faculty, consumed the dross of frailty and worldly affections, and expelled all the cowardice and coldness of human nature. So suddenly, so wonderfully did it exalt and refine their thoughts and desires, and render them like those bodies whose every particle is penetrated by this subtle element. For the more solid these bodies naturally are, the fiercer is the heat they take, the longer do they retain it, and the less are they consumed by it.

This heat in the preachers did soon spread itself and kindle a proportionable degree of it in their hearers. Their hearts too caught upon this fire, and (as ^c St. Luke elsewhere expresses it) *burned within them* at the powerful words of this truth. A farther effect of this Spirit; not only to warm at the first hand, but to convey and diffuse that warmth from thence to other objects. For so he did by rendering the exhortations and examples of these few disciples so moving and successful, that numbers of proselytes were daily added to them, who did not only imitate, but rival their zeal for a persecuted faith. And who, in despite of all the solicitations of flesh and blood to the contrary, embraced it at the known and certain peril of their liberties, their lives, and every thing that the world is used to count most dear and desirable.

But let us by all means take notice, that this was a gentle and harmless and kindly, not a consuming and devouring fire; such fire as that by which God heretofore manifested himself to Moses in the bush; an emblem of light and comfort, a warmth of devotion and charity, of activity and vigour and undaunted courage; not of fierceness and contention and mischief. And therefore they who foment division and discord, and under pretence of zeal for religion commit violence upon the public peace, or act against the dictates of common humanity, are not touched with a coal from above, nor do they *know what manner of spirit they are of*.

IV. The immediate effects of this descent of the Holy Ghost, and the persons upon whom it was wrought, come next to be considered. Now that effect was *speaking with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance*; and the persons who spake thus were all ^eGalileans. Natives of a country held in great contempt among the Jews, and in particular for being heavy and ignorant and unpolished. The men before us were known to be such; bred up to mean trades, and

^b Acts iii. iv. v.^c Luke xxiv. 32.^d Ver. 4.^e Ver. 7.

destitute both of capacity and opportunity to acquire any degree of those abilities which they now exerted in the utmost perfection. And what could be a more evident proof of God speaking in them and by them, than the doing that in an instant, which the study of a whole life could hardly, if at all, qualify any man to do? Here was no room for delusion, where every hearer was a judge for himself; and where those that heard were so many, of regions so distant, and of languages so very different from each other. So amazing are the improvements where God condescends to teach; and so manifestly does it appear that he teaches immediately by himself, where art and nature are so far outdone, where the foolish are empowered in a moment to *confound the wise*, and the weak chosen to *confound the mighty*. This left no room for *flesh to glory in his presence*, but proved itself beyond all contradiction to be a *power from on high*. That power indeed is proved by every miracle of every sort which these disciples wrought in infinite variety. But yet to any one who considers this matter carefully, there will several good reasons discover themselves, wherofore the speaking with tongues should upon this occasion be made choice of, as the first evidence of the Holy Ghost's operation upon these persons. Some of which I shall endeavour to make my reader sensible of in a following discourse upon this festival.

WHIT-SUNDAY.

THE GOSPEL. St. John xiv. 15.

15 *Jesus said unto his disciples, If ye love me, keep my commandments.*

16 *And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever;*

as I must, leave you again. But he shall

17 *Even the Spirit of truth; whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth him not, neither knoweth him: but ye know him; for he dwelleth with you, and shall be in you.*

18 *I will not leave you comfortless: I will come to you.*

19 *Yet a little while, and the world seeth me no more; but ye see me: because I live, ye shall live also.*

20 *At that day ye shall know that I am in my Father, and ye in me, and I in you.* the entire union between my Father and me, and me and all the members of my mystical body.

15. Your obedience is the proof I expect of your love.

16. I will prevail for another Comforter, to be sent in my place, who shall not, supply my place to you, and

17. The Spirit, I mean, who is then seen and known, when men partake of his sanctifying graces, which the wicked world, because such, can have no experience of; but, &c.

18. Thus it is that I intend to come and comfort you.

19. Thus shall ye be sensible of my presence and favour, and, in virtue of my

20. For this Spirit, as it makes (so it shall convince

21 *He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me: and he that loveth me shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him, and will manifest myself to him.*

22 *Judas saith unto him, not Iscariot, Lord, how is it that thou wilt manifest thyself unto us, and not unto the world?*

23 *Jesus answered and said unto him, If a man love me, he will keep my words: and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him.*

24 *He that loveth me not keepeth not my sayings: and the word which ye hear is not mine, but the Father's which sent me.*

communicated to and by me: and hence it is that they who do not observe the one cannot partake of the other.

25 *These things have I spoken unto you, being yet present with you.*

26 *But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you.*

Acts ii. 18, 33. Matth. x. 20. Rom. viii. 9. Gal. iv. 6, &c.) to act for my honour, in my stead, and upon my business, shall instruct and refresh your memory with all things necessary for you to know and teach.

27 *Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid.*

28. *Ye have heard how I said unto you, I go away, and come again unto you. If ye loved me, ye would rejoice, because I said, I go unto the Father: for my Father is greater than I.*

to the throne of the Father, who, as the root of my Divine nature, is even in that respect greater than I, who derive it from him: how much more with regard to my human nature! So that my going to and abiding with him is to be looked on as an happiness and advancement.

29 *And now I have told you before it come to pass, that, when it is come to pass, ye might believe.*

the exact agreement you will find between them, be a great strengthening to your faith; for which purpose it is that I discourse thus with you now.

23. The manifestation I mean, is that of inward light and grace, which shall never depart from them who are careful to live as I have commanded them.

24. As the Spirit, so the word, is originally my Father's, though both communicated to them who do not observe

26. The Holy Spirit, sent by the Father (and elsewhere said to be sent by the Son, and styled the Spirit of both. See chap. xv. 26, xvi. 7.

g. Gal. iv. 6, &c.) to act for my business, shall instruct and

shall instruct and

28. Though you might for your own convenience wish my stay, yet the leaving you is more advantageous, by exalting my human nature

to the throne of the Father, who, as the root of my Divine nature, is even in that respect greater than I, who derive it from him: how much more with regard to my human nature! So that my going to and abiding with him is to be looked on as an happiness and advancement.

29. These warnings reflected on, and compared with the events, will, by the

the exact agreement you will find between them, be a great strengthening to your faith; for which purpose it is that I discourse thus with you now.

30 *Hereafter I will not talk much with you: for the prince of this world cometh, and hath nothing in me.* 30. My time with you now is like to be very short, for the devil, by his wicked instruments, is just about to take away my life. In which, though I am not obnoxious to his power, as having no sin;

31 *But that the world may know that I love the Father; and as the Father gave me commandment, even so I do.* 31. Yet I give myself up to the will of my Father, even in this point: that the whole world may see and imitate my love and obedience, even in the most difficult instances.

COMMENT.

THE gifts of the Holy Spirit are usually distinguished into two sorts, the ordinary and extraordinary. The former are those sanctifying graces by which every good Christian is regenerated, cleansed, prevented, assisted, strengthened and comforted in his duty. The latter are those miraculous powers, which as on this day began to be imparted as an accomplishment of our blessed Lord's promise to his disciples. Of the former we have had an account in the scripture for the Epistle: of both it is very reasonable to understand this Gospel. Of the ordinary from the 16th to the 25th, of the extraordinary at the 26th verse. Which last being a subject most suitable to this solemnity, a solemnity consecrated in peculiar manner to the honour of the blessed Spirit of God. Having already explained the extent of his office as a *Comforter*, I shall now apply myself to set forth that light which this and other passages have given us into the nature of the Holy Ghost: and then, secondly, I will inquire into the true meaning of that privilege which the disciples were to expect from him, contained in those words, ver. 26, *He shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you.*

Concerning the nature of this Spirit, first, the account given of it will, I conceive, abundantly justify us in making the several conclusions that follow.

1. First, That the Holy Ghost is a person, and not a mere quality or operation. It is confessed, that some passages in the New Testament, where the word *spirit* is used, do carry that sense: but then those are such as, by an usual figure of the cause for the effect, mean only the gifts and influences of that Spirit. But then some other passages are observable, to which no other signification but that of a person can fairly be applied. Thus this Spirit is said to *come* and to *be sent*; to *come in the name* of one person upon a message from another; to *receive* from one, and to *shew* to others; to assist, to teach, to guide, to refresh the memories of them to whom he comes; and to discharge the office of a Paraclete: all these are attributed to the Spirit in this very discourse to the disciples. And elsewhere we read of the Spirit ^f *making intercession*, of his being ^g *grieved*, of his proceeding with discretion and choice, and ^h *dividing* his gifts to *every man severally as he*

^f Rom. viii. 27.

^g Ephes. iv. 30.

^h 1 Cor. xii. 11; Matt. xii. 32.

will; of ⁱ *blaspheming* and *lying* to him, of *tempting* him; of persons being ^k *baptized* into his name, ^l *separated* or consecrated to him, and called by him to the *work* of the ministry. Now from hence, I conceive, we are abundantly warranted to infer the personality of the Holy Ghost; because such things are here attributed to him as cannot, with any propriety of speech, be affirmed of a quality or operation, or indeed of any but a person.

2. The Gospel for the day does likewise strongly intimate that the Spirit here spoken of is a Divine person; for none but God can know all truth, and none can teach all who does not know all; none but he who is essentially united to the Son of God could bring all those things to remembrance which the Son had said, because whoever does so must be privy to all that was said. This argument St. Paul makes use of, and it is drawn indeed from experience and common sense: *What man knoweth the things of a man, save the spirit of man which is in him? even so the things of God knoweth no man, but the Spirit of God.* And it is observable, that the argument of no mind being perfectly known by any but itself is there alleged in proof of the Spirit's searching all things, even the deep things of God: and to shew how safely we may upon that account yield our assent to every thing which shall by this Spirit be revealed to us; though such as no collections of our own reason can give satisfaction in, or make any discovery of. To these we may add those other passages which call the Holy Spirit ⁿ *God* and *Lord*, which affirm that he ^o inspired the Messiah, that he spake ^p by the prophets, and that by ^q his inhabitation regenerated Christians become living temples, and dwellings of God. As therefore the unity of the Son with the Father is frequently implied by the Father being ^r *seen of him, known by him, manifesting himself to him, shewing all that himself doth*, and the like; so may the unity of the Holy Ghost with Father and Son both be not unfitly gathered from his ^s *being sent by the Son*, and *by the Father in the Son's name; receiving of the Son's*, and of ^t *the Father's*, to shew to the disciples; (for he is therefore said to receive of the Son's, because *all things that the Father hath are the Son's*;) so again, *teaching*, and *calling to mind* all that ever the Son had taught before; especially if to all this we add that he is expressly styled, not only *the Spirit of God* and *the Spirit of the Father*, but *the Spirit of the Son* and *the Spirit of Christ* ^u.

3. The texts referred to in the margin do also imply that procession of the Holy Ghost from the Father and the Son which the church hath generally received as a matter of faith. For though these three persons be, in all considerations relating to the Divine nature, equal; so as that with regard to time or power, or any other perfection, none is greater or less than another; yet in dignity and order of relation there is some difference. The Father is in this regard supreme, because the original, the source, the root of the Godhead. A Godhead, from all eternity

^l Acts v. 3, 9. ^k Matt. xxviii. 19. ^l Acts xiii. 2. ^m 1 Cor. ii. 10, 11. ⁿ Acts xiii. 2; v. 3, 4, 9. Compare 1 Cor. i. 1; Gal. i. 1; 1 Tim. i. 1. ^o Isaiah lxi. 1; Luke iv. 18, &c. ^p Isaiah vi. 8, 9. Compare Acts xviii. 25, 26. ^q Jeremiah xxxi. 33; Compare Heb. x. 15, 16; 2 Peter i. 21; 1 Cor. iii. 16, 17. vi. 19; Ephes. ii. 20, 21, 22. ^r John xv. 26. ^s John xiv. 26. ^t John xvi. 14, 15. ^u 1 Peter iv. 14; Ephes. iv. 30; Matt. x. 20; Rom. viii. 9; 1 Peter i. 11; Gal. iv. 6.

communicated to the Son, who is therefore acknowledged for the second person: and the same Divine nature is again imparted by both these to the Holy Ghost, whose eternal procession from the two former gives him the third place in the ever-blessed Trinity. This must be confessed a vast and an adorable mystery, too profound for man to penetrate or distinctly to conceive. For how should a poor worm be able to comprehend the perfections of an infinite God? But since revelation teaches that so it is, reason agrees that it ought to be received with an humble and submissive faith. As God hath not, so I think I might venture to say, that (according to those bounds of perfection within which he thought fit to limit the several beings created by him) he could not, let men into a complete knowledge of all the depths of the Deity. But then I add, that what he hath revealed is sufficient to command our belief of those things which we cannot perfectly know. And such I take to be the intimations given in this and other scriptures, of the Holy Ghost being a person, a Divine person, and a person proceeding from God the Father and God the Son.

II. I come now, in the second place, to inquire into the true meaning of that privilege promised at ver. 26, by saying, *He shall teach you all things, &c.* And the questions that naturally offer themselves here are two. (1.) What is meant by *all things*, or, as it is elsewhere expressed, *all truth*? (2.) Who are the persons to whom this promise belongs; whether the apostles and first preachers of the gospel, or whether the church, and the pastors of it in every age, to the end of the world?

(1.) As to the former of these inquiries, it is generally agreed that *all things* here must not be extended to truths of every kind, but confined to such as the office of the persons concerned in this promise, and the trust delegated to them, requires; that is, religious and divine truths. Hence some have understood the 26th verse so strictly, as not to allow that any new doctrine was communicated by the Spirit, but *those things* only taught more perfectly which our blessed Saviour had imparted during his abode upon earth: such among these as were obscure explained, and such brought to remembrance as had been forgotten.

(2.) But be it granted that some religious truths were afterwards revealed to these apostles, of which our blessed * Saviour made no mention; (as I think our Lord hath intimated there should be;) yet will it not follow from hence, that the Spirit should in equal measure assist the successors of these apostles, and the church universal, unto the world's end. Because the teachers and governors of it in succeeding ages cannot stand in need of the same security from error, either for publishing new doctrines, or for interpreting and declaring old ones. And therefore we have reason to think that privilege was never in our Lord's design which is not agreeable to the reason of the thing.

Now, that the apostles themselves should be endued with the fullest and clearest illuminations of the Spirit was absolutely needful; because these persons were intrusted with the first establishment of the gospel. Had not they therefore been so furnished with all necessary

knowledge, as to preserve both their judgments from error and their memories from unfaithfulness, no safe dependence could have been had upon their doctrines. But it is as plain the same necessity does not lie for the Spirit's infallible guidance in after-ages; because these apostles had committed their doctrines to writing, and those writings were presently received and delivered down as the standard of the Christian religion. So then, though the rule itself must be exact and straight to qualify it for doing the business of a rule, yet there is not the same occasion for things to be so that come under this rule, and are to be measured by it. The reason is, because whatever in these is crooked or defective will soon be discovered by comparing it with, and amended by conforming it to, that rule; and thus stands the case with the Christian religion. Had not the apostles been safe from falsehood and mistake, it could not have been so fixed as to demand a rational assent. Hence these are termed *the foundation* on which the church is *built*. But all the care left for them that come after is to suit the building to that foundation; to follow the first model, and to see that both their materials and their workmanship be of a piece with it. This is St. Paul's meaning, 1 Cor. iii. And every wise builder is sensible what difference there is between laying a foundation and carrying up a superstructure. In the former no nicety can be too great: in the latter the proportions lie ready in sight, and a moderate care will suffice; because the foundation itself is a direction for making the rest of the work agreeable to it.

That the utmost care was actually employed in laying the foundation of Christianity, those *signs and wonders and mighty works* assure us, by which (as the author to the ² Hebrews observes) God *bore witness* to the apostles. And therefore the continuance of this power, which since hath ceased, was yet at that time necessary; because the miracles wrought by the Spirit gave evidence that the persons working them did both speak and write by the same Spirit. God would not thus have sealed any doctrines not dictated and approved by himself, and delivered exactly according to his own mind and direction.

I cannot therefore but think, that if men were disposed to be peaceable and fair, the disputes concerning the extent and accomplishment of the promise now under debate might be compromised to very good content, upon allowance of these following particulars:

1. That the promise to these disciples was absolute, and proved so to be by the miracles that gave testimony to them. The condition of the Christian religion requiring such infallible assistances to be afforded them as might satisfy posterity that the grounds of it were laid in perfect and unerring truth, and that all delivered down from these hands might without any hazard be firmly relied upon.

2. That these disciples have answered their character and trust by leaving men information sufficient for their everlasting salvation. This was the purport of their commission. This the end of enduing them with wisdom and power from on high. And is it to be imagined that God would give so many signal appearances of himself in so great and necessary a work, and leave it imperfect at last? which yet he hath

done, if all necessary truth be not left us by those who were divinely inspired with this very intent, that men, by having recourse to them, might be under no danger of wanting any knowledge needful and fit for the safety of their souls.

3. That the writings and records of these disciples do to their followers supply the place and uses of the Spirit's infallible guidance vouchsafed to them. They laid the foundation, we are to keep to it. Their business was to plant a new doctrine, ours is to hold it fast. They indited the Scriptures, we have nothing to do but to study and obey them. The Scripture, it is acknowledged, is the sense, and not the words and syllables contained there; but the things that are necessary are intelligible of themselves, provided men bring an honest mind, and apply proper means: and in things not necessary, men may entertain different opinions without hazard to their souls. Thus in this spiritual house too, the rooms may be differently framed or adorned without danger to themselves or the building; but all must hold upon the same foundation, and unite in the principal and essential parts of the structure. But however, I make no difficulty to add,

4. That this promise, which to the apostles was absolute, may be allowed to belong to the church in all ages, under certain conditions and limitations. They were infallible, as following the dictates of the Holy Ghost in all they spoke and wrote: the church is infallible so far as her determinations agree with their writings. A learned man hath illustrated this difference by a very pertinent similitude: "The apostles and the church (he says) may be compared to the star and the wise men. The star was directed by the finger of God, and could not but go right to the place where Christ was. But the wise men were led by the star to Christ, so that if they would, they might follow it; if they would not, they might choose. So was it between the apostles writing Scripture, and the church. They in their writing were infallibly assisted to propose nothing as a divine truth but what was so. The church is also led into all truth, but it is by the intervening of the apostles' writings; but it is as the wise men were led by the star, or as a traveller is directed by a mercurial statue, or as a pilot by his card and compass: led sufficiently, not irresistibly; led so as that she may follow, not so as that she must." This seems to give the true state of the case, and shews how, in this respect too, the Spirit *abides* with Christ's disciples for ever. For he abides with all whom he assists, but he does not make all whom he assists infallible. We have not the like visible and wonderful effects of his divine presence now which the first disciples had, because we need them not. But we have, at least, if not unfaithful and wanting to ourselves, we may have, as much as is sufficient for our present circumstances. Consolations and instructions are ever at hand to all that are diligent to ask and improve them; and we have abundant ground to trust and to pray, that *God, who as at this time did teach the hearts of his faithful people, by sending to them the light of his Holy Spirit, will grant us by the same Spirit to have a right judgment in all things, and evermore to rejoice in his holy comfort; through the merits of Christ Jesus our Saviour, who liveth and reigneth with the Father, in the unity of the same Spirit, one God, world without end. Amen.*

MONDAY IN WHITSUN WEEK.

THE EPISTLE. Acts x. 34.

34 *Then Peter opened his mouth, and said, Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons:*

35 *But in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him.*

36 *The word which God sent unto the children of Israel, preaching peace by Jesus Christ: (he is Lord of all:)*

37 *That word, I say, ye know, which was published throughout all Judæa, and began from Galilee, after the baptism which John preached;*

38 *How God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Ghost and with power: who went about doing good, and healing all that were oppressed of the devil; for God was with him.*

39 *And we are witnesses of all things which he did both in the land of the Jews, and in Jerusalem: whom they slew and hanged on a tree:*

40 *Him God raised up the third day, and shewed him openly;*

41 *Not to all the people, but unto witnesses chosen before of God, even to us, who did eat and drink with him after he rose from the dead.*

42 *And he commanded us to preach unto the people, and to testify that it is he which was ordained of God to be the Judge of quick and dead.*

43 *To him give all the prophets witness, that through his name whosoever believeth in him shall receive remission of sins.*

44 *While Peter yet spake these words, the Holy Ghost fell on all them which heard the word.*

he did at his first plenteous effusion on the day of pentecost. Compare ch. ii. 4 with v. 46 here, and ch. xi. 15, &c.

45 *And they of the circumcision which believed were astonished, as many as came with Peter, because that on the Gentiles also was poured out the gift of the Holy Ghost.*

44. In the same manner, and exerting himself in the same miraculous effects, as

45 *For they heard them speak with tongues, and magnify God. Then answered Peter,*

47 *Can any man forbid water, that these should not be baptized, which have received the Holy Ghost as well as we?*

48 *And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord. Then prayed they him to tarry certain days.*
 48. Then he gave order for water accordingly, and so they were baptized (most probably by St. Peter himself) into the belief of Jesus Christ, and so made his disciples by the method himself had appointed for that purpose.

COMMENT.

THE former part of this scripture, which contains St. Peter's sermon to Cornelius and his company, hath been already made use of by our church, in the devotions due to the passion and resurrection of our blessed Lord. The latter, which is indeed the part peculiar to the present festival, gives us another instance of the miraculous power of the Holy Ghost. And this, having likewise exerted itself in speaking with new tongues, presents a fit opportunity for finishing what was yesterday left behind, and adding such other remarks as the instance now in hand ministers occasion for.

I begin with that which more immediately belongs to the subject of yesterday's discourse, wherein I proposed to offer at some reasons for the fitness of choosing this instance of speaking with tongues, as the first demonstration of the Holy Spirit's working with and upon the minds of the disciples.

1. This gift, above any other, facilitated the discharge of that trust left in their hands by Christ at his ascent into heaven, *Ye shall receive power*, says he, *after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you, and ye shall be witnesses unto me, both in Jerusalem, and in all Judæa, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost parts of the earth.* And again, *Go ye out into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature.* Had this new, like the former dispensation, confined itself to one race or nation of men; diversity of languages had been of no further use than any other evidence of the Spirit by which the truth and mission of the preacher was confirmed. But this religion was intended to be universal, no person or people to be excluded from the benefit of it. Yet still here were conditions required; for nothing less than faith and obedience could entitle to those benefits. Now, as St. Paul argues, how shall men believe without hearing? And *how shall they hear without a preacher?* And if the hearers *know not the meaning of the preacher's voice, shall not they be unto him that speaketh barbarians, and he that speaketh be a barbarian unto them?* The first step then towards rendering the gospel beneficial to all nations must in reason be a qualifying the propagators of it to converse with all nations. For no argument can convince till it be understood; so that, allowing the force of the disciples' discourse to be never so irresistible in point of reason and matter, yet all this had been

but a beating of the air, and could make no impression while couched in terms unknown to the parties with whom they were to argue. Now the capacity of reasoning aptly and clearly, though but in one or a very few strange languages, is an attainment that costs much time and difficulty, even to the most acute parts and unwearied application. How tedious then, if at all possible a work, must the conversion of foreigners have been to undertakers under such disadvantages as the apostles and disciples of Jesus manifestly laboured with! And therefore, how necessary a gift was this of tongues above any other for them, whose commission extended to every nation and language under heaven! especially if it be considered,

2. That this, in the reason of the thing, would be a certain expedient, not only for conveying the knowledge of what they taught to the understandings, but for gaining it authority and influence upon the affections of their hearers. Put case they could have acquired a readiness of expressing themselves by their own industry, this might indeed procure to them esteem and applause: but what is esteem and applause for prevailing with men to embrace new doctrines and mysterious truths, to root out inveterate and agreeable corruptions, and to plant mortification, severe virtue, and self-denial in their stead? No authority less than divine is sufficient to persuade such a change; no faculty attained by human methods can prove a divine authority; but when clear evidence is made of this in one instance, no difficulty will be found in believing it in others. Allowing therefore these disciples to have spoken with other tongues by divine inspiration, the natural consequence of this would be, that the matter spoken of was of the same original, and divinely inspired too. It being unconceivable, that God would be at the expense of a miracle to furnish men at this rate with words to express any doctrine which was not of his own dictating; and therefore this miracle in particular was exceedingly serviceable, because it rendered the persons endued with it persuasive and powerful and convincing, by this very manner of rendering them intelligible.

3. The last particular proceeded upon a supposition of these new tongues being a miraculous gift. I add, thirdly, that the manner of imparting and exercising them plainly proves that they were so. That all extraordinary graces of the Spirit were imparted at certain times, and in certain measures, not unnecessarily and promiscuously distributed, seems to be reasonably inferred from sundry passages in Scripture. Even these new^f tongues were plainly limited; for it is said, they spake as the Spirit gave them utterance. And such utterance, no doubt, was proportioned to the advantage of religion and the occasions of the church. In matters foreign to these, the disciples continued to be common, or even below the level of common men. To which purpose we read that the council of the Jews did some time after, upon examination, *perceive that Peter and John were unlearned and ignorant men*, and that upon this discovery they *marvelled*. And marvel well they might; because the more of weakness and ignorance appeared in these men upon other occasions, the more irrefragable was the proof that those attainments which were above the most learned to compass,

^f Acts ii. 4.^g Acts iv. 13.

wholly different from and by no means suitable to their other qualifications, could be from no strength or acquisition of their own. And therefore, when they, whose infirmities were remarkable for not speaking that of ¹ their native country in purity and perfection, were found upon all occasions able and ready to hold religious conferences in the language of any country whatsoever: more could not be desired to satisfy any considerate hearer that it was not, could not be, they that spoke, but *the Spirit of their Father which spoke in them*. And this it was that rendered these tongues, so given, such as all their adversaries were unable to gainsay or resist. But concerning the wonderful accomplishment for and success in their ministry which these disciples received from above, another occasion will require me to treat shortly. From this general part of the argument I therefore turn my thoughts to such remarks as the instance now in hand may seem to require of me.

The case before us differs extremely from the former. The persons there were apostles and teachers; here Gentiles, strangers, and not so much as covenant believers. There the Spirit was given as an ability to teach; here it is bestowed as a recompense and approbation of the people's desire to learn. There these gifts fulfilled an antecedent promise, and were expected by express command; here they prevent all ² expectation, and are not only the surprise of an apostle, the amazement of all the beholders, but even the envy of many who seem to have been favoured in like manner before, but could not receive the news of this honour done the uncircumcised without some degree of grudge and indignation. But as they, when the whole matter was rehearsed, saw cause to rejoice and glorify God, so we shall be likeliest to improve by this mercy, when the true meaning and extent of it is rightly understood. In order whereunto I would recommend the following observations:

1. This passage shews not only that those persons who were before in covenant with God, as the Jews, but that others also, as the Gentiles, who had no such antecedent relation to him, did, upon their conversion to the Christian faith, acquire a full right to the privileges of the gospel. Plainer proof of this could not reasonably be had or desired than the miraculous operations of the Holy Ghost, vouchsafed in the same manner to Cornelius his company, which had before so eminently distinguished the disciples at the day of pentecost. And hence St. Peter urges this plea, and the apostles and brethren allow it, in his vindication, that God had dispensed with those rules of behaviour commonly in use, which had kept up so wide a distance between these two sorts of men: *1 As I began to speak, the Holy Ghost fell on them, as on us at the beginning—Forasmuch then as God gave them the like gift as he did unto us, who believed on the Lord Jesus Christ; what was I, that I could withstand God? When they heard these things, they held their peace, and glorified God, saying, Then hath God also to the Gentiles granted repentance unto life.*

2. From hence, and indeed from sundry other passages in the New Testament, it appears that the new proselytes to the faith were fre-

¹ Matt. xxvi. 73; Mark xiv. 70.

² Matt. x. 20.

³ Acts xi.

⁴ Acts xi. 15, 17, 18.

quently, if not generally, endued with a ^a power of working miracles. The several directions for exercising the different gifts of this kind for the edification of the church, the many warnings against being puffed up with their own, and coveting or envying those imparted to others, are all most reasonably believed to proceed upon this ground. Of which St. Chrysostom gives this account: that such powers were intended for sensible demonstrations of God's approbation, and acknowledgment of the persons partaking in them. And among these ^a he instances in that of tongues, imparted to the converts from heathenism in particular; thereby to make amends, as he presumes, for the want of those previous helps to Christianity which they enjoyed, who had all along been brought up under and well acquainted with the writings of the Old Testament. Be the force of that reason as it will, the fact seems out of dispute. As by abundant intimations (to call them no more) in Scripture itself, so by express testimonies of the most ancient and authentic writers. And what could be a greater glory to the apostles, or contribute more to the establishing their authority, than that such astonishing powers were not only imparted to their own persons, but by their means and ministry conveyed to others upon whom this doctrine had its proper efficacy?

3. We should by no means neglect to observe, in the third place, that these effusions of the Holy Spirit, liberal and glorious, and manifestly divine as they were, did not yet supersede the necessity of those sacraments which Christ had left as ordinary marks and means of conferring and expressing church-membership among his followers. For what is St. Peter's inference from these miraculous gifts? Is it that the persons on whom they rested had no need of baptism? No; but that these were an evidence that God had a favour for, and saw their sincerity, and was thus pleased to testify that they were fit objects for baptism. And accordingly he took care that they should immediately be made disciples who had this evidence of being believers before. *Can any man, says he, forbid water, that these should not be baptized? &c.* So far is the baptism of the Spirit, even where that is undeniable, from excluding the baptism of water, or any of the extraordinary methods of grace from intending to break in upon and overturn the regular establishments and orders of the church. And sure one cannot wish a stronger proof than the instance before us, that the outward washing is not merely a figure or representation of the inward in this sacrament; but a rite of initiation, and an essential part of the sacrament, which the graces of the Spirit may be the foundation of a just claim, but never (where the other can be had) a lawful dispensation to any man for.

The more usual course indeed is for those inward effects to accompany, and the increase of them to follow after, the use of the outward visible sign. Of this also we have remarkable instances in this book of Acts, one of which will be brought under consideration by the scripture appointed for to-morrow's Epistle.

^a Acts vi. viii. xix; Rom. xii; 1 Cor. xii.

ⁿ Chrysost. t. 3. p. 429. ed. Eton.

^o Acts x. 47.

MONDAY IN WHITSUN WEEK.

THE GOSPEL. St. John iii. 16.

16 *God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.*

to save sinful mankind by faith in that Son.

17 *For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved.*

18 *He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.*

19 *And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil.*

they stand out against the clearest evidence, and refuse their own manifest advantage, by reason of that propoession of mind which their own sins and lusts have brought upon them.

20 *For every one that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reproved.*

21 *But he that doeth truth cometh to the light, that his deeds may be made manifest, that they are wrought in God.*

to it, and honour brought to that God in

16. The death I speak of (ver. 14, 15.) is an effect of God's wonderful love; who makes use of this expedient

17, 18. This is the design of his coming into the world, which yet takes effect upon particular men, only as they comply with or neglect this condition required on their part.

19. The aggravation of their crime, and the justice of their punishment who believe not, appears in that

20, 21. This being the nature of wickedness, to dread discovery; as it is of goodness to offer itself freely to common observation, in order to have justice done obedience to whom it acts.

COMMENT.

THE Gospel for this day is of vast extent and importance; it informs us how extremely solicitous God hath shewed himself for the true interest and happiness of mankind, and how wretchedly negligent and insensible a great part of them are of their own; how much he hath condescended to do for them, and how little they are content to do for themselves. The former of these declarations is contained in the two verses at the beginning: the latter in the remainder of the passage now before us.

In the former we have, first, an account of God's giving his Son, his begotten Son, his only begotten Son, of the same divine nature and perfections with himself. A gift incomparably, infinitely more valuable than any the most excellent of his creatures. Giving this Son up to death, to a painful and ignominious death; for such is crucifixion, intimated by *the Son of man being lifted up*, at the 14th verse. Giving him for *the world*, that is, (as I have formerly proved that word to signify,) for his creatures, for the vilest and most unworthy of his creatures, sinners and enemies; nay, for all these in general. Good

Lord ! that even to these thy boundless compassion should shew itself, pitying the miseries and loving the persons of the offenders, at the same time that it could not consist with the perfection of thy holiness, not to hate and require satisfaction for their offences ! so just, so comfortable is the apostle's inference which we have leave to make on this occasion, *He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things ?*

The end designed to be promoted and secured by this gift is a farther demonstration of the kindness of the Giver. Mankind by sin had forfeited their claim to bliss and immortality : they were obnoxious to death, as that imports the final dissolution of their bodies ; and that yet worse death, the endless misery of their souls. Now this Son was given, that he by dying might rescue them from the dominion of death, and procure to their bodies a resurrection to life again ; and that, by atoning for their guilt, he might pacify the wrath of God, and bring peace and pardon to their souls. This was to preserve them from *perishing* in any sense ; and to purchase for them *everlasting life* in the most exalted and beneficial sense which that expression any where bears, or can possibly be capable of.

But it could not consist with the purity of God's nature, or the condition of man's, to make us happy without being holy ; and therefore *faith* in this Son is necessary. Not to bear speculative assent to his doctrines, but such a lively and active principle as may influence our behaviour, and prove and recommend its sincerity and vigour by a constant obedience to his commands. And this is so reasonable and (in comparison of former dispensations) so easy a duty, that the changing our terms so much for the better, and appointing faith for the condition of attaining a happiness far above all we can ask or think, is still another instance and considerable enhancement of the love God was pleased to express for the world upon this occasion.

These considerations, taken all together, leave no manner of reason to doubt the intention of this inestimable gift to have been for the general good of mankind ; and yet that a very great part of them do still *perish*, and never attain to the *everlasting life*, which is the proper effect of it, cannot be denied. But our Saviour hath told us how this comes to pass, by declaring the necessity of the condition imposed, and that the final state of every soul, either for life or death, is so unalterably suspended upon the performance or the neglect of this condition, as to render the happiness of the faithful and obedient on the one hand, and the misery and punishment of the finally impenitent and unbelieving on the other, as certain, as if each were fixed already in either of these states respectively.

The difference between these two extremes is unconceivable. Exquisite felicity makes the one, which magnifies the mercy of the Giver ; eternal torments the other, which nevertheless is no reflection upon the justice of the punisher. For where the case is so clear, the advantages so unequal, the terms so practicable, the choice so free, and the warning what will be the consequence of such a choice so express, how can the obstinacy of wicked men be excused ? I should have said,

how can it be accounted for, had not our blessed Lord acquainted us both with the nature of the fact and with the cause of it in these words : 9 *This is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil.*

How justly the metaphors of light and darkness are applied to the truths of the Christian revelation, and the miserable blindness of mankind before they were blessed with this guidance, hath been largely explained [†] heretofore. The same arguments will in great measure hold concerning the lives of them who live under this light, when they act unsuitably to so holy a profession, and *hold the truth in unrighteousness*. The darkness of these men consists in doing those which are so often styled *the works of darkness*, and which had nothing to be offered in mitigation even for heathens themselves, but that they had been educated in these things and knew no better. But where the Sun of righteousness is risen, and darts his rays round about, their darkness who inhabit the happy regions enlightened by him is so affected, so guilty, and so monstrous, that nothing can be alleged sufficient to excuse any who continue at high noon to wander and stumble and fall, as if it were still the dead of night. These therefore are in most eminent degree the persons that *love darkness rather than light*, and justly condemned for so absurd and perverse a choice, when both reason and interest agree to persuade the contrary.

To this it is commonly objected, that such condemnation however is very hard, supposing men to govern themselves according to their present sense of things, since it is certain no man deliberately chooses to be mistaken, and therefore all error in judgment cannot be a fault, but is only a misfortune.

But the answer is plain and easy. It is allowed that to be mistaken in matters of the highest concern is an evil, and that no evil is chosen as such, but always under a wrong apprehension of good. Thus darkness is not loved under the notion of darkness, but upon pretence of its being a better light. Those that are infidels continue such, because they profess to have stronger arguments for denying than any urged by us to incline their belief. And they that are vicious indulge their corrupt lusts, because they think to find their account in gratifying better than in denying and subduing them. Yet all this notwithstanding, if the evidence of reason overbalance on the contrary side, themselves are answerable for the false inferences they make. For though they do not choose the false conclusion as false, yet they choose the premises, which naturally tend, and almost determine them to that false conclusion. And this is our Lord's meaning when he assigns the cause why men *love darkness rather than light, because their deeds are evil.*

Considering the discomforts and dismal effects of darkness, especially of spiritual, by far the worst of all darkness, it might have been expected that the persons shut up under it should have sought, have loved, and, like restless men after a long night, have lain and wished at least for break of day. But quite contrary, alas ! the light came, and they would none of it. The best and most glorious light, and they preferred the blackest of all darkness before it ; the reason of which

amazing stupidity is from the engagements easily foreseen to follow upon the receiving this light. For that which at first procured so cold entertainment for the Christian religion, and in truth makes the submission to it still like ground gained inch by inch, is, that the truths revealed there are expected not only to enlighten our understandings, but to influence and regulate our affections, to set bounds to our desires, and be a standing rule to all our actions. Otherwise the doctrines of it are grounded upon facts attested with greater evidence than any other historical points have ever been able to produce in their own confirmation. And there is no man who disbelieves the gospel, (if he be not so capricious as to credit nothing which his own senses have not given demonstration of,) who does not readily assent to other relations upon much weaker proofs. The precepts of religion are likewise so rational in their own nature, so profitable in their consequences, and enforced by motives so weighty, that there is no man who lives in disobedience to these, who does not at the same time submit to many things more difficult and disagreeable upon views less certain and less advantageous. So that it is plain such people are far from being determined by the true reason of the thing; and therefore, whatever may be pretended, some other cause lies at the bottom of these false judgments and irregular practices.

Now of the many ill effects which a course of sin hath upon us, this is one of the principal, that it debanches and perverts our understandings. For all habitual sins are owing to the predominance of some ungoverned passion, which the more we have accustomed ourselves to indulge, the more ground it gets over our reason, whose proper business it is to govern our passions. These two proceed upon different views, and pursue different ends; the one, gross and bodily, and sensual and present; the other, refined and pure, intellectual and future pleasures. This is the combat of *the flesh against the spirit*, and the contrariety of *the spirit to the flesh*. These the *lusts* therefore to be *abstained from*, because they *war against the soul*. These cloud the reason of people immersed in them, and are like a false medium, which represents every object otherwise than really it is; and by the opposition between religion and them, they raise a prejudice and hatred against all truths with which it is impossible they should be reconciled. Hence the men whose affections are thus biassed find themselves indisposed to inquire and consider, and when they do, they do it unfairly: they are manifestly averse to receive any principles which must disturb their beloved enjoyments, and work a change in their desires and manner of living. So that in all these cases it is not the man, but his passions and corrupt customs, by which the judgment is made, and he who brings himself under the dominion of these hath weakened his faculties, bent his will, and so far unmanned himself, by parting with the true prerogative of his nature, and losing at once the inclination and the ability of thinking and acting rationally. And if the case stand thus with regard to reason, it must needs be the same in respect of religion, which is the best and most improved reason.

For I appeal to the experience of any one who hath suffered an ill habit to grow upon his mind, whether he do not feel a coldness to all exercises of piety and virtue, whether he be not often loath to come

to church, to hear good sermons, to read good books, whether he do not take less delight in these things in proportion as he delights in his sins more, whether he do not shun, and, when that is not done, dislike, and suffer great uneasiness in, the company of grave and virtuous persons, such as are used to do the true friend's part, and tell him freely of his faults and failings, and press him hard to take new measures. And what can be the meaning of this, but because he cannot endure to be awaked out of his pleasing dream, and therefore contrives to go on as unmolested as he can? No man cares to hear of what he cannot justify, and yet will not amend; and therefore this is a delusion and blindness so far chosen as it wilfully declines and even dreads the proper means for being disabused. And such another fatal choice it is, as that of giving way to mortification by obstinately refusing to let the wound be searched.

I appeal again to people hardened in vice, whether they have not now quite other apprehensions of sin and of religion than those their first temptations found them under. Whether the horror and shame of the one, and the awe and reverence for the other, do not sensibly wear away and lessen upon every breach of duty. And whence is this, but because custom renders the worst of crimes familiar, and hardens the conscience by often pressing upon it? And as the corruption of nature gathers strength, that grace which should correct it makes more feeble impression. But still this alteration is made by habits, and those habits are made and confirmed by repeated acts, and each of those acts is voluntary. Admitting then that persons so vitiated have lost their taste, yet the disease by which the taste is lost they brought upon themselves. And therefore, like drunken men, they are answerable to justice for all the consequences of that want of understanding, the true cause whereof is a disturbance and loss, properly their own act, nay, and itself too an unlawful act and deed.

When I speak of men's reason being perverted by their vices, I would not be understood only of lowdness and riot, and such profligate debaucheries as are scandalous and brutish, but of all vices in general. For there are several consistent with sobriety, and a regular conduct to the eye of the world, whose influence is equally malignant. Such are pride and vainglory, covetousness and ambition, faction and partiality, immoderate self-love and positive self-conceit. In short, all come within the notion of *evil deeds* here, which either indispose men for examining, or prejudice them in determining. And either way *darkness is loved rather than light*, for whether they will not consider carefully, or whether they do not judge equally, still the truth suffers contempt. Which indeed is never received to purpose, except when *received in the love thereof*.

Most justly therefore is religion styled *wisdom*, as upon other accounts, so in particular for this, that the love and practice of it is so very essential to our improvement. For a good man searches boldly, and dares to find the truth, and to acknowledge it. He is under no fears of being reproached by any discoveries he may make, and therefore he makes all he can. And he will not fail of making such as are useful and valuable: for to be what one ought to be is a very great step toward knowing what one ought to know.

TUESDAY IN WHITSUN WEEK.

FOR THE EPISTLE. Acts viii. 14.

14 *When the apostles which were at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent unto them Peter and John :*

15 *Who, when they were come down, prayed for them, that they might receive the Holy Ghost.*

these new Christians might receive a blessing, (which did not attend upon that of an inferior order,) such gifts of the Spirit as testified the favour and acceptance of God, and answered the exigencies of his church at that time.

16 *(For as yet he was fallen upon none of them : only they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.)*

(though, in the case of Cornelius and his company, it even went before that sacrament ;)

17 *Then laid they their hands on them, and they received the Holy Ghost.*

over them, and used the ceremony of laying on of hands ; whereupon the persons concerned in those prayers, and that imposition of hands, did receive the Holy Ghost.

14, 15. Philip having done the utmost his commission extended to, by preaching to and baptizing the people of Samaria, the college of apostles sent two of their number, that by their ministry these new Christians might receive a blessing, (which did not attend upon that of an inferior order,) such gifts of the Spirit as testified the favour and acceptance of God, and answered the exigencies of his church at that time.

16. It not having pleased God to confer this gift upon them immediately after baptism, it even went before that sacrament ;)

17. Accordingly those two apostles came, and prayed

over them, and used the ceremony of laying on of hands ; whereupon the persons concerned in those prayers, and that imposition of hands, did receive the Holy Ghost.

COMMENT.

The Scripture now under consideration I design more particularly to apply, as the generality of interpreters, and indeed the Christian church at large, seem to have done, to the rite of confirmation ; which, as now practised in the church of England, it will be no hard matter to discern sufficient example of reasons for, and encouragement to, in these four observations that follow :

I. That in order to obtaining the gifts of the Holy Spirit something farther seems ordinarily requisite to be done for persons already admitted into the church by baptism.

II. That those gifts seem to have been bestowed by the ministry of the highest order of officers in the church.

III. That their ministration upon this occasion consisted in prayer and laying on of hands.

IV. The efficacy of these means to the men of Samaria, and the success reasonably to be hoped for from the use of them in the case of Christians in general.

I. I observe, that in order to obtain the gifts of the Holy Spirit something farther seems ordinarily requisite to be done for persons already admitted into the church by baptism. If the practice of the apostles may be taken for a measure of their opinion, two instances in the book of Acts set this matter sufficiently clear. Here we find the Samaritans converted, diligent attenders, and zealous believers of the Christian doctrine, received into Christ's flock and family by baptism ;

and yet, to make these good beginnings complete, the apostles were sent down in order to implore those assistances and powers of the Holy Ghost, which as yet were ^a *fallen upon none of them*, notwithstanding *they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus*. The other case of St. Paul at ^b Ephesus strengthens this evidence very much. He, upon ^c inquiry, finding that some disciples there were so far from having themselves ^d received, that they had not so much as heard of any effusions of the Holy Ghost, and that they had hitherto been baptized into ^e John's baptism only, first explains, and then administers to them, baptism in *the name of the Lord Jesus*. After which follows that upon ^f *Paul's laying his hands upon them, the Holy Ghost came on them*. Now that ^g *laying on of hands* was a rite distinct from baptism, and one of the principles of the doctrine of Christ, we need no better testimony than the Epistle to the Hebrews. And no less clear it is, that, consequent to this rite, there was a conferring of the Holy Ghost distinct from any thing received in baptism. To which purpose confirmation is in some ancient ^h writers termed *a seal*. And St. Paul's action at Ephesus, mentioned just now, hath been thought to be referred to in those words of his epistle to the Christians of that city, *In whom* (i. e. Christ) *also after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that Holy Spirit of promise, which is the earnest of our inheritance*. The same interpretation some have put upon another place in this Epistle, where they are forbidden to ^k *grieve the Holy Spirit of God, whereby they were sealed to the day of redemption*; and that to the Corinthians, ^l *He which stablisheth us with you in Christ, and hath anointed us, is God; who hath also sealed us, and given the earnest of the Spirit in our hearts*.

To this I own it may be said, that those gifts of the Spirit, with which the imposition of the apostles' hands was usually attended, differed extremely from any imparted now. Thus much is expressly affirmed of the disciples at Ephesus, and with great probability believed of the other instances. Since, then, the miraculous powers, anciently communicated by this rite, have long ago ceased, why should not the practice itself cease? or what effect can we ever expect from it?

Now it is to be considered, on the other hand, that by the Holy Ghost in Scripture are to be understood, not only the several powers distributed in the primitive church for working miracles, but every sort of grace and assistance attributed to this Spirit, as the author of sanctification to mankind. Allowing therefore, that the first Christians were, at *laying on of hands*, endued with such extraordinary gifts of the Spirit, as God thought fit then to do honour to this religion by; yet even thus the rite may, and still does, very reasonably continue, for the actual conferring such other valuable and necessary benefits as every age of Christians are encouraged to pray for, and depend upon by virtue of the same Spirit. And these, by way of distinction from the former, are usually styled the common and ordinary graces of the Spirit.

Again. The workings of this Spirit are gentle and gradual, and his assistances communicated in proper times and proportions. He was

^a Ver. 16. ^b Ch. xix. ^c Ver. 1, 2. ^d Ver. 3. ^e Ver. 4, 5. ^f Ver. 6. ^g Heb. vi. 1, 2. ^h Cyr. Epist. 73. Ambr. de Initiat. cap. vii. ⁱ Eph. i. 13. ^k Eph. iv. 30. ^l 2 Cor. i. 21, 22.

given by Christ to the apostles before his ^m ascent into heaven, and he was given again in a different manner and measure at the day of ⁿ Pentecost: in both cases so, as that neither did the first donation make the second unnecessary, nor the second rob the first of its due honour and efficacy. Thus are the ordinary graces infused with distinction; at baptism first, at confirmation afterwards: yet so in each, that baptism asks confirmation to finish and consummate the Christian; and confirmation presupposes baptism, as strength implies life, and to grow to have been born. *The Holy Ghost, (says an ancient writer,) which descends with saving influence upon the waters of baptism, doth there give that fulness, which sufficeth for innocency, and afterwards in confirmation he exhibits an increase of farther grace.* In the former he lists Christ's soldiers under his banner. In the latter he equips and arms them for the battle. This seems to have been the concurrent sense and language of antiquity: and as the notion they had of the necessity of this rite to perfect what had gone before preserved its constant use, so the dignity of it seems designed to be signified by that which I made my

II. Second observation, the reserving those administrations in which the Holy Ghost is thus bestowed to the highest order of officers in the church. The people of Samaria had proceeded as far as Philip could lead them. He was of an ^p order instituted originally to assist in charitable distributions, but allowed upon occasion to preach the word, and in the absence of a higher officer to baptize. The apostles therefore at Jerusalem, in order to make those new converts partakers of the Holy Ghost, send down two of their own number to perform a service peculiar to that highest rank and their successors, and consequently, such as Philip and all of any inferior degree were excluded from. In agreement with this method of proceeding, we find, in succeeding times, when the bishops were present, and the parties baptized were at years of discretion, confirmation immediately followed baptism. And the two only reasons of delaying it appear to be, either the infancy of the person baptized, or the absence of the bishop, who is the proper minister of this holy rite. Meanwhile the church, in all ages reserving this as the bishop's inviolable peculiar, could not better and more effectually express her constant opinion both of the profound reverence due to this rite, and of the important consequences to be expected from the observance of it.

III. My third observation regards the means whereby the Holy Ghost was bestowed on the men of Samaria, and in proportion upon other confirmed Christians; which the 15th and 17th verses evidently shew to have been *prayer*, and *laying on of the apostles' hands*.

1. The former of these is ^q prayer. A service appointed to testify our entire dependence upon the goodness of God, to express the sense of our wants, and to obtain supplies suitable to them. But as no wants are of equal necessity, nor any supplies of equal value and consequence with our spiritual, so are there none which we are allowed with equal security to rely upon being furnished and assisted in. It

^m John xi. ⁿ Acts ii. ^o St. Cyprian. Ambr. and Euseb. *Enchiridion* in Pentecost.
^p Acts vi. viii. xxi. ^q Acts viii. 15.

is with regard to these more especially that we are encouraged by that gracious invitation, *Ask, and ye shall have; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you.* And the good things which in one evangelist our heavenly Father is said to bestow, are explained in another, by declaring that he will give the *Holy Spirit* to them that ask him.

The graces of this Spirit are therefore the proper object of a Christian's most zealous importunity. We are to ask them for ourselves, we are to ask them for one another; but especially the church, by its spiritual fathers, is to ask them for all the children and family of God. Thus did the apostles here for the newly baptized proselytes at Samaria; thus, after their example, do their successors, the bishops, in the holy rite of confirmation. Of which prayer is deservedly esteemed an essential part: as having in this particular exigence such glorious promises to justify it; and as an humble acknowledgment that the precious gifts conferred on this occasion are not the effect of their own power and holiness, but of his abundant mercy, who does honour to their character and his own institution, by granting the requests of men to whom he hath committed so weighty a trust as the government of his church.

2. The other part of this solemnity is imposition of hands. Of which we have frequent instances of Scripture, whereby it seems to be principally directed to the two following purposes:

1. The determining one's self to those particular persons on whom the hands are laid. Thus Jacob and others in the "Old Testament" seem, in the acts of praying and blessing, to restrain the mercies implored at that time. Such a peculiar interest is often expressed by confining the intent and benefit of our devotions upon some uncommon emergencies. Hence this ceremony is retained in the offices of our church upon three very signal occasions. The consecrating men to God's immediate service by holy orders; the absolution of the sick upon particular confession and request; and this of confirming those who publicly own and take upon themselves the obligations of their baptism. Which last, now under consideration, may, from what hath been already delivered upon it, sufficiently appear to be a case proper for this significant ceremony, as well as the two former.

2. Another meaning of this rite there is, importing some more than ordinary authority (and that generally of a spiritual kind) in the persons empowered to use it. Thus Jacob blessed Ephraim and Manasseh, not as a parent only, but a prophet. Moses laid hands on Joshua by express command from God, and as supreme minister over his people. The apostles acted by delegation from Christ. He alone acted by a power paramount and inherent. When he gave this Spirit, he gave of his own, and therefore he dispenses it with authority. For he *breathed* on his apostles, and said, *Receive ye the Holy Ghost.* A ceremony most absurd for any beside himself, who, by praying, acknowledg'd their authority not to be *supreme*, though laying on of hands with prayer implies it to be *sacred*. This is however an intimation, that through the faith-

[†] Compare Matt. vii. 11, with Luke xi. 13.

[‡] Ver. 17.

^u Genesis xlviii.

^{*} See Col. for Confirm.

^v John xx. 22.

fulness of him that made it, the promise is as sure to the regular use of those means, as if they who in virtue of their high function ask it had themselves power to give it. I speak herein the manifest sense of our church, which puts these words into the mouths of her bishops: *Almighty and everlasting God, who makest us both to will and to do those things that be good and acceptable unto thy divine majesty; we make our humble supplications unto thee for these thy servants; upon whom (after the example of thy holy apostles) we have now laid our hands, to certify them (by this sign) of thy favour and gracious goodness toward them, &c.* This is such a mixture of humility and faith, as well agrees with the purest and most primitive times; this a decent and a necessary recognition due to the honour of that God and Saviour who is the fountain of all goodness and grace. Such as we have great reason to be confident will make way for that which is the

IV. Fourth and last observation proposed, the efficacy of these means, and the success we are allowed to hope for, in the case of all Christians who shall regularly and devoutly apply themselves to God in the use of them.

Of this we may collect somewhat for our comfort from what was just now spoken upon the topic of prayer. But, besides the encouragements common to other addresses for God's grace, I reckon some peculiar to this I am now treating of. Two it shall suffice at present to mention, one with regard to the institution, another to the end of it.

1. This rite having been practised by the apostles, and from them continued down to us, we may fairly conclude it an instance of duty and worship, and every way agreeable to the will of God. The first institutors of it acted by the dictates of the Holy Ghost, and were by him instructed what to do, and what to appoint, both for the present age and for posterity; so that their institutions are indeed God's institutions. And it were very absurd to imagine that they who lived with and next them should not distinguish what services were temporary, and limited to some certain state of Christianity, and what were standing ordinances calculated for all ages and conditions of it. The Scripture then, by giving evidence of this practice, proves it to be no invention of superstitious men; and the history of the church, by testifying the continuance of it after the miraculous gifts of the Spirit ceased, shews it to have had a view farther than those gifts only, and, in the unanimous consent of succeeding ages, to have been a rite of singular acceptance with Almighty God, and of general use to the souls of men.

And if the case stand thus, the question of its efficacy is determined to our hand. For *this* (says St. John) *is the confidence that we have in him, that, if we ask any thing according to his will, he heareth us. And if we know that he hear us, whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we desired of him.* So that the disappointment of our prayers is always of ourselves; owing to some disagreement between our requests and the will of God; otherwise they always succeed according to our wishes. If then God always grant when we ask as he approves, will he not much more grant when we ask as he appoints?

Then to deny were to frustrate his own ordinance, to overturn the foundation of hope which his own hand hath laid, and to mock that confidence and application which his own word hath both commanded as a duty and extolled as a virtue.

2. The other consideration, relating to the end of this rite, is twofold: as it concerns men, either in the quality of private Christians, or members of Christ's body, the church.

The end it aims at in private Christians is a public recognition of, and solemn undertaking for, the vows made in baptism. And what can more conduce to the honour of God and the increase of true religion, than for all to ratify, with that deliberate choice which mature years and judgment are qualified to make, those debts and obligations, for which the charity of the church did before accept of a security given by other hands on their behalf? With those sureties the office of baptism contracts, till the *infant come of age to take this upon himself*; for this the catechism was intended as a qualification, by inculcating the substance of Christian religion. For so the very title of it declares, *A catechism, that is to say, an instruction to be learned of every person, before he be brought to be confirmed by the bishop*. For bringing children hither the sureties are required to take care, in the concluding admonition at baptism and the third rubric after the catechism. The whole Confirmation Service turns upon this; and the rubric after it forbids the admitting any to the Lord's Supper who are not either actually confirmed, or ready and desirous to be confirmed. The reasonableness and wisdom of all which appointments appear from hence: that the church esteems the baptizing of infants a work of piety and great charity; that baptism is a covenant between two parties, God and the person; that God contracts by his minister and the church, the infant by sureties, because not in a condition of transacting for himself. But, when he arrives at such condition, and the necessity of bondsmen ceases, then the only way to secure himself is to make the covenant his own act and deed. And he who is not willing to this, what does he in effect but, in all construction of reason and common sense, disclaim and disannul, and cut himself off from, all benefits by that covenant indented for? And sure, to such unthankful, careless, lost wretches, the church does very justly deny those privileges of higher and more perfect communion, which they alone are fit to rejoice in, who are content not only to be called, but think it their happiness really to be and to live like Christians.

And let not them who come to this solemn rite in that good disposition of mind entertain the least distrust or doubt of its efficacy. We are assured by our blessed Lord's own words, that *to him that hath shall be given, and he shall have abundance*: and that *those who come to Christ, he will in no wise cast out*; and again, by God the Father, that *them who honour him he will honour*. And where shall we find an instance of approaching the Father and Saviour of men more likely to engage his favour than this? Is it not, in our Saviour's sense, to *have*, when we are ready to employ the graces already bestowed, and come panting and gasping for more? And shall not a soul thus *hunger-*

ing and thirsting after righteousness be filled? Is it not to come to Christ, when we express holy resolutions in the solemnest manner that can be, by devoting ourselves entirely to his service all the days of our life? And can it stand with the truth of God that such comers should be cast out? Is it not to honour him and his gospel, when we publicly thank him for the conditions made for us in our infancy, satisfy the world that we have considered the nature of our duty, and esteem our faith reasonable, and our service freedom?—that therefore we will now no longer be Christians by necessity or chance, but by deliberation and choice, and in full conviction of the excellence and advantages belonging to that character? Hence it is we offer to contract afresh, bid battle to our spiritual adversaries, and shew that, as we are not ashamed of what was done for us before, so we are determined never to retract what is doing now. If any action in a man's life could deserve grace, one might venture to say this would be it. But grace must still be grace, and cannot become a debt to our best works. However, that which cannot challenge it will not fail to incline it as effectually, as seasonably, as if we had it at our own disposal.

2. The end of confirmation concerns men as members of the church; because this is to testify our unity and fellowship with the rest of our Christian brethren. It was formerly customary for every new bishop to give public satisfaction of his being orthodox, by sending a summary of his faith to all the principal sees. Thus all under his inspection were secured, that, by holding with one so owned and approved, they held communion with all the Christian churches. The same is virtually done in all our consecrations at this day, where all persons are not allowed only, but invited, to challenge the party propounded: on which occasion silence is construed approbation. Hence the mark of unity or schism hath been that of men holding or breaking communion with the bishops of their respective dioceses; and their business it is to approve every man before his admission into the church. For infants the rule of charity takes place, so long as they are proper objects of charity. But, when ceasing to be so, they also come to be approved personally at their confirmation. In persons adult, this is done at their first entrance by baptism; for no such, by our rubric, is to be baptized, without leave first obtained from the bishop; and till he, or some other appointed by him, be satisfied that the party so desiring baptism be duly qualified to receive it. Which, by the way, shows, that persons before confirmation (as not yet arrived to a complete membership) are justly refused the holy table, except their own desires supply the defect of the thing itself. In which case, being in no fault, a person ought not to suffer for want of an opportunity not in his power to have. This again shews, why common priests cannot be so proper instruments of confirmation, because the keys are not vested in them, nor hath the church made them her judges, who are to be kept out and who let into membership. The completing whereof is very fitly reserved, as a prerogative due to their character, with whom the censures are lodged; and ought to increase our reverence for a rite, which hath ever been reputed worthy to stand as a mark of distinction between the episcopal and

inferior orders. Now, to understand the efficacy of confirmation, as consequent upon this state of the case, it must be remembered, that the promises of grace belong to us only as members of Christ's body the church, united in him the Head. 'He is the vine, we the branches; and it is his own inference that we partake of the sap only while we are joined to the tree. If therefore we refuse to be incorporated, or if we either cut or suffer ourselves to drop away from the stock, we lose all title to his cherishing influences, and are become dry and withered wood. Now the rite I have been speaking of declares our regular communion with our own particular church. Thus it secures our perfect unity with all good and sound Christians, and fixes us in Christ; and then we are safe: for St. Paul assigns men's falling away to their *'not holding the Head, from which all the body by joints and bands having nourishment ministered, and knit together, is increased with the increase of God.*

My enlargement on this subject hath been more than was intended; I wish it may be as much as is necessary. But the best argument for this practice to prevail and keep up its esteem, will be, for the fathers of the church to administer so holy and important a service with frequency and authority; for the people to attend and bring those they stand engaged for to it, with diligence and a devout sense of their duty and the benefits accompanying it; and for all who have already discharged this part, to live so mindful of the solemn engagements here repeated and ratified, and in so conscientious an adherence to those spiritual fathers, whose ministry God makes use of for conveying his Spirit to them; that the holiness of men's lives, the peace of the church, and the paternal care and affection of its governors, may prove that this grace hath not been received in vain, but that God is in them of a truth. And may he grant to all his servants *'strength to withstand the temptations of the world, the flesh, and the devil, and with pure hearts and minds to follow him, the only God, through Jesus Christ our Lord.* Amen.

TUESDAY IN WHITSUN WEEK.

THE GOSPEL. St. John x. 1.

1 *Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that entereth not by the door into the sheep-fold, but climbeth up some other way, the same is a thief and a robber.*

Messiah, or without regular commission presumes to govern and teach the people, he comes to do mischief, and make havock of, not to feed and profit the sheep.

2 *But he that entereth in by the door is the shepherd of the sheep.*

3 *To him the porter openeth; and the*

1. I tell you Pharisees^b, who oppose my doctrine, and blaspheme my miracles, that whoever sets up for the

presumes to govern and teach the people, he comes to do mischief, and make havock of, not to feed and profit the sheep.

2. But he that comes by God's appointment is the true Shepherd.

3. Him God calls to this

sheep hear his voice: and he calleth his own sheep by name, and leadeth them out.

diligent and conscientious

4 *And when he putteth forth his own sheep, he goeth before them, and the sheep follow him: for they know his voice.*

his example), and good men imitate and hearken unto him.

5 *And a stranger will they not follow, but will flee from him: for they know not the voice of strangers.*

6 *This parable spake Jesus unto them: but they understood not what things they were which he spake unto them.*

7 *Then said Jesus unto them again, Verily, verily, I say unto you, I am the door of the sheep.*

compare himself to that door, it being by

8 *All that ever came before me are thieves and robbers: but the sheep did not hear them.*

9 *I am the door: by me if any man enter in, he shall be saved, and shall go in and out, and find pasture.*

10 *The thief cometh not, but for to steal, and to kill, and to destroy: I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly.*

advantage, and so approve myself a true teacher.

office, and his faithful servants obey him, and he is in the discharge of his duty.

4 He, according to the custom of shepherds in that country, leads his flock (by

5. But they suspect such as come and intrude upon them.

6. This was intended for a reproof to the Pharisees, but they did not understand what those allusions meant.

7. Jesus therefore (upon mention of the fold and the door) took occasion to compare faith in him only that men

8. All therefore (says he) that pretended to be Christ's, or oppose me that alone am so, are—

9. It is by me alone that the spiritual sheep can be safe, or fed to eternal life.

10. The false teachers intend nothing but to make a prey of the people; I come for their infinite benefit and

COMMENT.

This Gospel is a continuance of our Lord's reproofs to the Pharisees, whose unreasonable severity to the man born blind^c had given him most just provocation. He, for acknowledging Jesus to be the author of his sight so miraculously restored, and drawing the inference naturally resulting from thence, that a person who could work such wonders^d must needs be a prophet sent from God, was, for this gratitude and good reasoning, "cast out of the synagogue." Hence our Lord took occasion to reprove that vanity and scorn, wherewith the then teachers and rulers of the Jewish people treated him, and exalted themselves^e. The mighty illuminations they pretended to, he allows to be no better than darkness and blindness. Now this, by being affected and wilful, exceedingly aggravated their guilt. For they were therefore blind, because, in despite of all persuasion to the contrary, they continued to shut their eyes against the light which he had brought into the world.

^c John ix. 13, &c.

^d Ver. 24, &c.

^e Ver. 34.

^f Ver. 39.

Hence he proceeds to shew, that so long as they did so, matters were not possible to be amended with them. In regard that light, which he came to diffuse, was the only true and saving light. For the better illustration whereof he turns the metaphor, and, by the comparisons of a shepherd and a door, argues, that salvation was to be obtained by him alone: and that he approved himself the faithful and true Shepherd, as well by the manner of entering the fold as by his behaviour in it.

The reasons of our Lord's taking upon him the title of shepherd, and of comparing his disciples to sheeps, have been considered in a former discourse. The arguments whereby he justifies his claim to that title are, ^h*his coming in by the door*; that is, having a full authority rightfully committed to him; and ⁱ*coming that his sheep might have life*, that is, executing his ministry for the real benefit of the flock committed to his care. Had he wanted the former, he had not been a shepherd; and had he been defective in the latter, he had not been a good shepherd, nor answered the intents and purposes of that character and office.

Again, when our Lord condescends to the resemblance of a *door*, he does in effect say that of himself here, which he is pleased, in other terms much of the like significance, to declare in another chapter of this Gospel: *I am the way, and the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me.* The same in sense, which St. Peter, ^k*filled with the Holy Ghost*, asserts before the Jewish sanhedrim, that Jesus of Nazareth is *the stone which was set at nought by those builders, which is become the head of the corner: neither is there salvation in any other, for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved.* In agreement whereunto it is, that faith in him is so often and so earnestly pressed, as the necessary condition of salvation; and that when he mentions his being *given*, as the most eminent instance of God's love to the world, he adds this restriction as to the benefit and efficacy of the gift, ^l*that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.* From whence, I conceive, the inference is just and unavoidable, that they, who will not believe in him, can have no ground to hope for everlasting life, but are in a desperate and lost condition. God having made no provision, that we know of, for the rescue of such men out of the condemnation which guilt involves them in, to whom the merits of this Saviour are not applied; nor declared any method for applying those merits, except that of *faith in his blood, whom God hath thus set forth to be a propitiation*^m.

This I take to be the main substance and design of the Scripture now before us; which we shall probably be better able to understand and profit ourselves of, by some few remarks now about to be made from it.

1. Now first, by what hath been delivered concerning the occasion of these words, we are led into the true meaning of that passage, *All that ever came before me are thieves and robbers*, viz. that this must mean all such as came in opposition to our blessed Saviour, and

^k Gospel for second Sunday after Easter.

^l Acts iv. 8, 12, 13.

^m John iii. 16.

^h Ver. 3.

ⁱ Ver. 10.

^j Ch. xiv. 6.

ⁿ Rom. iii. 25.

^o John x. 8.

preached up such doctrines as hindered men from believing on him, or supported them in a false dependence of being saved, either without any Messias at all, or by any other Messias. This was the case of those scribes and Pharisees who with so blind and malicious a zeal seduced the people at that time, and obstructed the success of our Lord's labours among them, who taught men to rely upon their own corrupt traditions, or to rest in the *carnal commandment*, the external observances of the ritual law, without due regard to the inward purity virtually contained in it; or without that perfection and accomplishment of the law in him, which the figurative parts of this institution looked forward at as their principal end and view. This was the case of those false Christs and false prophets, who about that time deluded great multitudes of credulous followers. But it must by no means be supposed to be the character of the Jewish teachers in general before our blessed Lord's appearance in the flesh. For these were many of them expressly sent by God, received their instructions immediately from him, and *spoke as they were moved by the Holy Ghost*. And for the rest, who did not act under such an extraordinary influence, so far as they taught the law pure and genuine, they took the true method for preparing and disposing men to believe in Christ, and did all that the condition of that time would bear for advancing his kingdom and the glory of it. They laid the foundations of that very faith, which in the fulness of time should have more clear revelations to finish, and bring it to a just perfection. In short, of these *thieves and robbers* our Lord adds, that the *sheep did not hear them*. And this by way of commendation to those sheep who so prudently and conscientiously stood upon their guard. But Moses and the prophets he frequently reproves the Jews for not hearkening to, and imputes their infidelity and obstinacy against him and his doctrine to not searching the ancient Scriptures, which every where testified of him. So exceeding vain is the defence some ancient heretics sought from this passage, for their blasphemous notion of the law and gospel being dictated and instituted by two different spirits; the former by an evil, the latter by a good being; and thereupon rejected the Old Testament entirely.

2. From hence it is easy to determine what is the *sheepfold* alluded to by our Lord, even the church of God and Christ; not that only, which since the publication of his gospel is spread over the face of the whole earth, but that which had a being ever since the world began, and will continue as long as the world shall have any being. This, I have formerly had occasion to shew, is one and the same; though, like one and the same man, differing from itself in point of age and proportion, and some other circumstances. But still the substance and nature of it was the same: still the foundation on which it stood was the same, Jesus Christ: still the condition of salvation was the same, faith in that Jesus. Faith more or less explicit and distinct, as the revelations afforded mankind were so: as faith in a Saviour to come, or in one already come, shewed the same object under different views, and rendered prediction or fact the motive and ground of per-

o 2 Peter i. 21.
after Christmas.

p John v. 39, 45.

q Manichees.
r Epistle for Christmas day.

r See Epistle for Sunday

suasion. This is the fold into which no man enters but by him, and thus we are to understand his being the door of it. This is the happy enclosure where we may depend upon life and safety, pasture and plenty. When all schemes of lean morality, and every fantastical expedient set up as opposite to, or sufficient without, faith in Christ, will miserably deceive the fond men that trust to them. They, instead of the good things they imagine themselves filled with, shall at last find nothing in their hands but delusion and sad remorse, and envy the once despised foolishness of Christian preaching and believing.

3. If Jesus Christ be the door, and his church the sheepfold, and faith the means of entering by that door into this fold, then surely no faith can let us in but only that which the Scriptures have delivered to us; so that men cannot be at liberty to garble and pick and cull, and believe what they conceive themselves able to account for, and reject what is mysterious, upon a pretence of being contrary to, because they feel it to be above, their reason. For this in effect would be, not embracing a religion delivered by God, but choosing one framed by our own selves; and in truth it is not believing, but dictating. It is very observable therefore, that such a profession of faith as I am pleading for is required of every person in the covenant of baptism; which plainly shews upon what terms we are accepted, and how indispensably necessary to salvation that faith is which so many now are not ashamed to expose: since into this fold we cannot set one foot without it, and out of this fold, (ordinarily speaking,) as of old out of the ark, is nothing but misery and destruction.

4. In the circumstantial parts of the allegory now before us, our Lord hath intimated to us the qualifications of a good shepherd. That he must be diligent thoroughly to know his flock, to consider their several wants and infirmities, and accommodate himself seasonably and properly to each of them; which we may very well suppose implied in that expression of *calling his own sheep by name*. That he must be careful, not only to instruct and exhort and encourage them by sound doctrine and seasonable admonitions, but also to guide and excite them by the piety of his example, for thus some have understood *leading out his own sheep, and going before them*. That his main view must be the benefit of his people, the welfare and salvation of their souls, the preserving them from the rapine and violence of a foe always ready to devour them: in a word, the esteeming his own wealth and happiness to consist chiefly in the bettering of their condition: not regarding the milk and the fleece only, nor undertaking this charge upon any other views than his own private advantage; which may very well be understood by the 10th verse, *The thief cometh not but for to steal, and to kill, and to destroy. I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly*. Once more, he is such a one as enters upon this office by a regular call and mission, is let into the fold by those who are intrusted to keep the door; and, in the personal absence of the chief Shepherd, have commission to act for and under him: so that what they do according to the powers received from him, he is esteemed the doer of; and all whom they employ are owned as his servants and stewards. These are the only *shepherds that enter by the door*, and to

whom the porter openeth: the rest climb up some other way; and such as do so are 'here declared by the Master of the flock to be no better than *thieves and robbers*. But of this more at large elsewhere.

5. Once again, as these parabolical expressions hint the shepherd's duty, so do they likewise that of the sheep. Such are attention and diligence to get instruction; application to their proper business; adhering steadfastly to their regular pastor, imitating the good example he sets them, *enduring sound doctrine, not having itching ears, nor heaping to themselves teachers, but being constantly upon their guard against all seducers, and suspecting the wicked designs of any that attempt to draw them off from a regular communion with him to whose care the laws of God and man have committed their souls.* All which some interpreters have collected from hence, that they are called the rightful shepherd's *own sheep*, that they follow him because they know his voice; that a stranger they will not follow, but will flee from him, for they know not the voice of strangers.

These remarks I the rather insist upon, because they seem, at this time especially, proper considerations both for priests and people. A fit introduction for the Ember fast: as well for those who are now about to be *ordained to any holy function*, that they may learn from hence the greatness of the obligation lying on them, *both by their life and doctrine to set forth the glory of God, and set forward the salvation of all men*; as for them to whom they shall be sent, that they may take good heed to those means of edification and salvation which a faithful ministry puts into their hands, that they may preserve the order and unity of the church, and at once secure the peace of the public, and that of their own consciences; which God give priest and people grace to do for his sake, whose *precious blood* was shed to *purchase* to his Father an universal church, *Jesus Christ our Lord.* Amen.

TRINITY SUNDAY.

THE COLLECT.

ALMIGHTY and everlasting God, who hast given unto us thy servants grace by the confession of a true faith to acknowledge the glory of the eternal Trinity, and in the power of the Divine Majesty to worship the Unity; We beseech thee, that thou wouldest keep us steadfast in this faith, and evermore defend us from all adversities, who livest and reignest, one God, world without end. Amen.

FOR THE EPISTLE. Rev. iv. 1.

1 *After this I looked, and, behold, a door was opened in heaven: and the first other vision, representing*
 Gospel for 1st Sunday after Easter, 8th Sunday after Trinity. = 1 Tim. iv. 3. * Ver. 4, 5.

voice which I heard was as it were of a trumpet talking with me ; which said, Come up hither, and I will shew thee things which must be hereafter.

2 And immediately I was in the spirit: and, behold, a throne was set in heaven, and one sat on the throne.

3 And he that sat was to look upon like a jasper and a sardine stone: and there was a rainbow round about the throne, in sight like unto an emerald.

4 And round about the throne were four and twenty seats: and upon the seats I saw four and twenty elders sitting, clothed in white raiment; and they had on their heads crowns of gold.

5 And out of the throne proceeded lightnings and thunderings and voices: and there were seven lamps of fire burning before the throne, which are the seven Spirits of God.

6 And before the throne there was a sea of glass like unto crystal: and in the midst of the throne, and round about the throne, were four beasts full of eyes before and behind.

likewise the appearances of four figures, in the standards of the house of Israel, and that all the people should be gathered under their ensigns by the profession of the gospel. And these being full of eyes intimated that the persons signified by them were endowed with the gift of prophecy, and all manner of necessary gifts and illuminations of the Holy Ghost.

7 And the first beast was like a lion, and the second beast like a calf, and the third beast had a face as a man, and the fourth beast was like a flying eagle.

8 And the four beasts had each of them six wings about him; and they were full of eyes within: and they rest not day and night, saying, Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, which was, and is, and is to come.

prophecies of the Old Testament; and their foreknowledge of momentous events under the New. And they are indefatigable in giving honour to the blessed Trinity of persons in the unity of the one omnipotent and eternal Godhead.

heaven open, and a voice calling loudly to me to attend to the strange and important events which God was now about to give me a foresight of.

2. Presently I saw God the Father sitting in majesty upon a throne;

3. In such appearances as denoted his power and justice and mercy, and the faithfulness of his covenant to mankind.

4. He was surrounded with blessed spirits, seated and habited like the elders or bishops of the churches about Jerusalem sitting with the bishop of that city in council.

5. Importing threatenings of God's fierce anger and vengeance against the Jews.

6. Denoting the people of Israel, as the glass does their actions and consciences, clearly seen through by this great Judge. And there were which used to be portrayed signifying four apostles, and under their ensigns by the being full of eyes intimated that they were endowed with the gift of prophecy, and all manner of necessary gifts and illuminations of the Holy Ghost.

8. These had six wings, denoting their zeal and readiness to propagate the gospel; and the number of their eyes denoted their perfect knowledge of the types and prophecies of the Old Testament; and their foreknowledge of momentous events under the New.

And they are indefatigable in giving honour to the blessed Trinity of persons in the unity of the one omnipotent and eternal Godhead.

9 *And when those beasts give glory and honour and thanks to him that sat on the throne, who liveth for ever and ever,*

10 *The four and twenty elders fall down before him that sat on the throne, and worship him that liveth for ever and ever, and cast their crowns before the throne, saying,*

11 *Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honour and power: for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created.*

TRINITY-SUNDAY.

THE GOSPEL. St. John iii. 1.

1 *There was a man of the Pharisees, named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews :*

2 *The same came to Jesus by night, and said unto him, Rabbi, we know that thou art a teacher come from God: for no man can do these miracles that thou doest, except God be with him.*

Thus concealed, he began with this night. The miracles Jesus had done were to him a sufficient evidence of his divine authority and mission.

13 *Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.*

God, and the qualifications for entering birth was necessary for that purpose.

4 *Nicodemus saith unto him, How can a man be born when he is old? can he enter the second time into his mother's womb, and be born?*

5 *Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.*

outward, and the sanctification of the Holy Ghost in the inward man, effected the birth he spoke of.

6 *That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.*

carnal births are effected by a fleshly, so the spiritual birth must be effected by a spirit, as its vital principle.

7 *Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again.*

1, 2. Nicodemus, who privately believed, not caring to offend the rest of his brethren the Pharisees and rulers, desired to have a private conference with Jesus, and therefore came to him by

ingenious acknowledgment, that the miracles Jesus had done were to him a sufficient evidence of

3. Hereupon our Lord (probably moved by some inquiries from Nicodemus concerning the kingdom of into it) told him that a new

4. This Nicodemus understood in a gross and literal sense, and thereupon objected, *How &c.*

5. This misapprehension our Lord corrected, by acquainting him, that the washing of water upon the

6. For all births answer to the principle that causes them; and therefore, as carnal birth must be effected

7, 8. And though the cause itself, and the manner

8 *The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit.* of its operation, cannot be discerned, yet it is sufficient in this case that the effects are manifestly discernible; which is illustrated by an instance taken from the wind in particular.

9 *Nicodemus answered and said unto him, How can these things be?*

10 *Jesus answered and said unto him, Art thou a master of Israel, and knowest not these things?* 10. Jesus reproved his slowness of apprehension, who knew it customary with the Jews to make proselytes by baptism, and to call them new men, who were thus entered into the Jewish church.

11 *Verily, verily, I say unto thee, We speak that we do know, and testify that we have seen; and ye receive not our witness.* 11, 12. What I now say, said he, is sufficiently confirmed by my miracles; but

12 *If I have told you earthly things, and ye believe not, how shall ye believe, if I tell you of heavenly things?* I have yet more mysterious truths to reveal, and if you find difficulty in this, how will you assent to those more sublime matters which I am about to discover?

13 *And no man hath ascended up to heaven, but he that came down from heaven, even the Son of man which is in heaven.* 13. Know then, that I, the Son of man, according to my human nature, have a more perfect knowledge of the will of God than any other prophet ever had; and came from thence, as no other ever did; even so as (in respect of my divine nature) to be in heaven at this very instant that I am conversing with you upon earth.

14 *And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up:* 14. And when* I must be lifted up on a cross, and die an ignominious death, a type whereof the brazen serpent was.

15 *That whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life.* 15. And the effect will correspond to it; for as all that looked up to that were healed of their plague, so all that look up to me by the eye of faith shall be released from the guilt of their sins, and be everlastingly happy in another world.

COMMENT.

THE solemn festivals which in the foregoing parts of this treatise have propounded to our consideration the mysterious work of man's redemption, and the several steps taken to accomplish it, do naturally lead us up to, and at last conclude with, that of the present day. The incarnation and nativity, the passion and resurrection of the blessed Jesus, demonstrate how great things the Son of God hath condescended to do for us. The miraculous powers with which the first disciples were endued, and the sanctifying graces with which all the faithful are assisted, prove how great and how necessary a part the Holy Spirit bore in this work, both for publishing the salvation of the world, and for rendering it

* So in edit. 1708. but query *where*.

effectual. And all agree in representing to us the inestimable love of the Father by whom that Son was sent, and that Spirit so wonderfully and so plentifully shed abroad; most justly therefore, after such informations how fit a subject this is for our wonder and adoration, does the church to-day call upon us to celebrate the mystery of those three persons in the unity of the Godhead, each of whom hath so kindly and so largely contributed to this united and stupendous act of mercy upon which the whole of all our hopes and happiness depends.

To this instance of piety and devotion we are excited by the portion of Scripture appointed for the Epistle; wherein the angels and blessed spirits, which pay their constant attendance about the throne of the Majesty on high, are represented to St. John, as with most awful and profound reverence acknowledging and worshipping the three holies, which are one eternal and almighty Lord God. A fit example for the church militant on earth to follow, because in so doing they do not only copy after, but, as it were, anticipate the constant employment of the church triumphant in heaven.

To the contemplation of this mystery we are likewise invited by the Gospel for this day; in which express and distinct mention is made of ^a God the Father, by whose power and immediate presence with Jesus the miracles attesting to his Divine authority were wrought: ^b of the Son, who declares himself to have come down from heaven, and even to be in heaven at the instant of conversing with Nicodemus upon earth: and of that ^c Holy Spirit, whose prolific operation upon the waters of baptism effects the new and spiritual, as of old it did the natural creation, when moving upon the face of the yet unformed deep; and whose sanctifying ^d graces act powerfully, though often undiscernibly, in changing the minds of men.

But as the blessed spirits above are our pattern for acknowledging this mysterious truth, so are they for the manner of contemplating it. Like them we should fall down before the throne, and with humble wonder adore a depth which we cannot penetrate. In regard therefore this is a doctrine entirely owing to divine revelation, the safest and most becoming method of treating it will be to shew those intimations thought to be given of it under the Old Testament, and then the clearer discoveries made of it in the New. From both which it will afterwards be natural and easy to infer the reasonableness of embracing it as a necessary article of faith.

1. The intimations supposed to be given of this doctrine under the Old Testament are such as follow:

The frequent mention of God by a name in the plural number with a verb singular; of which some learned Jews observe, that it is a warning not to believe more gods than one; and yet at the same time confess, that, were it not thus written, it could not be lawful for men to express themselves after that manner. The consequence they apprehend from hence holds indeed against a plurality of gods, but is of no weight at all against a plurality of persons in one only true God.

The several texts wherein God speaks, as it were, in consultation

^a Ver. 2.

^b Ver. 13.

^c Ver. 5, 6.

^d Ver. 7, 8.

and concert, * *Let us make man in our own image after our likeness—The man is become as one of us—Let us go down and confound their speech—Whom shall I send, and who shall go for us?* and the like.

The passages which name God as sustaining several capacities in one and the same sentence; such is that by which our Saviour grieved the scribes and Pharisees, † *The Lord said unto my Lord, Sit thou on my right hand*; and that other, which makes use of the name *Jehovah* twice, acknowledged incommunicable to any but the true God, where we read, that ‡ *the Lord rained down fire upon Sodom from the Lord out of heaven*.

Such intimations in particular manner are those places where the name of God or any of his attributes are thrice repeated; of which kind have been reckoned by some, Deut. vi. 4, Psalm lxxvii. 6, 7, Jerem. xxxiii. 2, Dan. ix. 19, and especially that § hymn of praise in Isaiah vi. repeated in the Epistle for this day, and taken in to the daily ¶ services of the Christian church. But these I choose to term intimations, and am content to lay but little weight upon them, in a point of doctrine so much more manifestly asserted in the gospel, as generally to be allowed a distinction peculiar to Christians. Let us observe therefore, in the

II. Second place, what those clearer discoveries of this matter are, which have been made to us under the New Testament.

In this argument I am to a considerable degree prevented by having had occasion heretofore to produce several * passages, which not only speak of God the Father, (concerning whom there is in the present question no dispute at all,) but of the Son and Holy Spirit also, in the same form of speech as of the Father. In such terms, I mean, and with such titles, and with those properties and perfections expressly attributed to them, as were most false, absurd, and impious, if applied to any other than the true God only.

Referring my reader back to those evidences, that each of these persons by himself is God and Lord, I shall at present confine myself to some places which mention all three with such notes of distinction as are a sufficient indication that they cannot be God in one person only. That the blessed virgin should become a mother without any concurrence of man is thus foretold by the angel: † *The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee: therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God*. Here are plainly distinguished from each other, the Holy Ghost, or power overshadowing; the Highest, whose power that Spirit is; and the holy thing, or person, who, because born of a mother impregnated by that power Divine, had upon this account a right to be called the Son of God.

At our blessed Lord's baptism, ‡ *the Spirit of God*, we read, *descended like a dove, and rested upon him, and a voice from heaven declared him to be the beloved Son of God*. And what can be plainer

* Genesis i. 26, iii. 22, xi. 7; Isaiah vi. 8.

† Genesis xix. 24.

‡ Te Deum.

§ Communion Office.

¶ Epistle and Gospel for Christmas Day, Gospel for Whit-Sunday.

† Psalm cx. 1; Matt. xxii. 42, &c.

‡ Epistle and Gospel for Christmas Day, Gospel for Whit-Sunday.

§ Lake i. 35.

¶ Matt. iii. 16, 17;

Lake iii. 21, 22; John i. 32, 33.

than the distinction here between the Spirit descending and resting, the Father whose voice pronounced Jesus his Son, and that Son himself, whom this Spirit rested upon, and this voice bore testimony to?

The same is to be said of those texts in St. John's Gospel which we have lately had occasion to consider: *"I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever, even the Spirit of truth: and, When the Comforter is come, whom I will send unto you from the Father, even the Spirit of truth, which proceedeth from the Father, he shall testify of me."* Here are manifestly acts and persons and capacities different. The Father, from whom the Spirit proceeds, whom the Son prays, and by whom, at the Son's request, that Comforter was given. The Son praying the Father, sending the Comforter from the Father, and testified of by the Spirit so sent. And the Spirit, prayed for, given by the Father, sent from the Father by the Son, testifying of the Son, and abiding for ever with those disciples from whom the Son had departed.

Again. *"If the Spirit of him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwell in you, he that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken your mortal bodies by his Spirit that dwelleth in you."* St. Paul in this place does evidently refer to Jesus the Son of God raised from the dead; to the Spirit of God by which he was raised; and to him that raised Jesus, and shall raise all in whom that Spirit dwells, because it is his Spirit.

In the name of these three persons all nations are to be baptized, as the standing form and method of making men Christ's disciples. In the name of these three those disciples are solemnly pressed. And our congregations, who were first admitted Christians by being baptized in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, have all the privileges of that character implored for them by that benediction with which they are daily dismissed, *"The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Ghost be with us all evermore."*

Meanwhile I must not omit to observe, that the Scriptures, which are so clear in the Trinity of persons, are not in any point whatsoever more express than in the Unity of the Godhead. Hence we so often read of *"one Lord, one God, and none other but he, who is therefore styled the only true God; that although to the heathen there are that are called gods many and lords many, yet to us Christians there is but one God the Father, of whom are all things, and we in him; and one Lord Jesus Christ, by whom are all things, and we by him."* That we are indeed baptized in the name of three, but still taught and bound to profess *"one Lord and one God, as well as one faith and one baptism."* In all which another apostle assures us there is no absurdity or inconsistency, by affirming, that *"there be threes that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost, and that these three are one."* And what greater proof can be reasonably demanded for a doctrine

^a John xiv. 16.

^r 2 Cor. xiii. 14.

^u Ephes. iv. 5.

^o John xv. 26.

^s Deut. vi. 4; Mark xii. 32; John xvii. 3.

^x 1 John v. 7.

^p Rom. viii. 15.

^q Matt. xxviii. 19.

^t 1 Cor. viii. 5, 6.

of so abstruse a nature, so remote from our conception, so much above our comprehension, than that three persons should be mentioned in Scripture (the only source of supernatural knowledge) in terms proper to God alone; that each should have perfections attributed to him which are visibly peculiar to God alone; and yet all this done so as, from more persons in the Godhead, to leave no umbrage for inferences against the Unity of that Godhead notwithstanding.

This indeed is a point necessary to be guarded, because the leaving it liable to just objection had defeated one great end of Scripture. For the Old Testament was intended to bring off the Jews, and the New to deliver the Gentiles, from idolatry. And that idolatry did consist, not in worshipping them which *by nature are no gods* instead of or exclusive to, but besides and together with, the one supreme and true God. So that, had not the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost been the one supreme and true God, those scriptures which so frequently, so solemnly, so industriously, and so plainly give to the Son and Holy Spirit the names and titles, the properties and honours given to the Father, had taken the ready and most effectual course for establishing and propagating that very idolatry which they were designed to suppress and utterly abolish. An absurdity that no writers of common sense and prudence, much less they that wrote by Divine inspiration, can be supposed guilty of.

This likewise shews that there can be no need of the many little shifts to which some interpreters have had recourse for avoiding the plain and literal constructions of the texts alleged in defence of this doctrine. All danger possible to arise from such construction being sufficiently provided against by the many other texts which inculcate the Unity of the Godhead: and the niceties by which they labour to turn off those which assert more Divine persons than one, being too subtle for the generality of people to be masters of, to whom the Scripture was meant for a rule. Men, I conceive, may be much more easily brought to understand the consistence of the word of God with itself in this matter, than to be satisfied in the evasions and artifices by which a meaning is fastened upon it, so foreign from the common and natural one which the expressions evidently carry.

Nor, lastly, does it appear that our reason is affronted by any contradiction in this doctrine. For these persons are nowhere affirmed to be three and one in the same respect; but one in substance, and three in the different manner of having and communicating that substance. One in all perfections essential to the Godhead; three in their mutual relations and capacities. Thus much is revealed; and more than is revealed of this matter we cannot know. So much as is revealed we have reason upon that account to believe: but the main difficulties commonly objected in this case will, when strictly considered, be found to lie, not so much against *that which is written*, as against the notions of bold and fanciful men; who, not content to be wise according to *that which is written*, will needs obtrude upon the world systems of their own, and undertake to explain what they do not understand. Nor is the use of reason within its proper sphere at

all infringed by this belief; for, by submitting to things above it which we cannot comprehend, it does not give up its right, nor enslave us to the degree of believing contrary to our reason, in things within our level, which we may and do comprehend.

Since then Scripture is clear in the truth of this mystery, and reason cannot gainsay it; since this belief is the distinguishing character of Christians, and the profession of it a necessary antecedent condition of our being such: since we have devoted ourselves in baptism, and there promised constant homage and obedience and adoration to the Trinity in Unity; let us, in all humility and reverence, agree with angels, and all the heavenly powers, with cherubim and seraphim, with apostles and prophets and martyrs, and with the holy church throughout all the world, in praising and acknowledging this holy, holy, holy, Lord God of Sabaoth. Even the Father of an infinite Majesty, his honourable, true, and only Son, and also the Holy Ghost, the Comforter; living and reigning one God world without end. Amen.

THE FIRST SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY.

THE COLLECT.

O God, the *strength of all them that put their trust in thee, mercifully accept our prayers; and because through the weakness of our mortal nature we can do no good thing without thee, grant us the help of thy grace, that in keeping of thy commandments we may please thee, both in will and deed; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

THE EPISTLE. 1 St. John iv. 7.

7 Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God; and every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God.

8 He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love. they who practise not, neither belong to God, nor are acquainted with him.

9 In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him.

10 Herein is love, not that we loved

7, 8. The true proof of our being God's children, and having a true knowledge of his nature and will, is Christian charity; which

Christian charity; which

9. How eminently this love is in God, the sending his Son for the salvation of a sinful world leaves us no room to doubt.

10. For of that love this is one great enhancement,

Son to be the propitiation for our sins. that it began on his part, was voluntary and free, without any obligation or desert on our part to incline it.

11 *Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another.* 11. And the proper way to express our sense of and gratitude for that wonderful love of God is to love one another, and, in imitation of this pattern, to extend our love even to those who do not deserve it at our hands.

12 *No man hath seen God at any time. If we love one another, God dwelleth in us, and his love is perfected in us.* 12. The reason of this inference is plain, because God is not in the compass of our good offices, and therefore the only method left us of expressing our love to him, whom we cannot converse visibly with, nor bring any benefit to, is to love those with whom we do converse, and who may be the better for us. This is in effect to do as he did.

13 *Hereby know we that we dwell in him, and he in us, because he hath given us of his Spirit.* 13. And this is a proof that he is with and in us, by the grace of his Holy

Spirit, when our dispositions and actions do thus resemble his.

14 *And we have seen and do testify that the Father sent the Son to be the Saviour of the world.* 14. Such is the evidence that we apostles give of having that Spirit, who to

our utmost hazard preach Christ and his doctrine, of the truth whereof we have undoubted certainty.

15 *Whosoever shall confess that Jesus is the Son of God, God dwelleth in him, and he in God.* 15. He that is thus content to adhere to Christ is the sort of man that God

is spiritually present with and united to.

16 *And we have known and believed the love that God hath to us. God is love; and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him.* 16. For the ground of this profession is the love of God in the redemption of the world. Love and good-

ness is his very nature and essence, and therefore every Christian maintains his mystical communion with him, in proportion as he imitates that great original.

17 *Herein is our love made perfect, that we may have boldness in the day of judgment: because as he is, so are we in this world.* 17. This is the perfection of our love, to do good, when sure to suffer evil for it; for so did Christ, and so should

we, though sure to meet with the like ill returns that he did.

18 *There is no fear in love: but perfect love casteth out fear: because fear hath torment. He that feareth is not made perfect in love.* 18. True love will stick at nothing, nor be discouraged by the prospect of any danger in the service of the party

beloved: which to a fearful man is a continual rack and check, and argues that love to be weak which hath not yet conquered this uneasy passion.

19 *We love him, because he first loved us.* 19. And in all this I am exciting men to no other proofs of their love to Christ, than they have already received of his

love to them. Nay, not so much; for his was free and undeserved, whereas ours is debt and gratitude.

20 *If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar: for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen?* 20. But let not any man pretend such love to Christ, who shews none to his brethren. For they who neglect opportunities of expressing it to them whose conversation is naturally an endearment, will be far from discharging it to God, with whom they cannot converse. And therefore the largest pretensions to this virtue, while the makers of them continue uncharitable, are certainly insincere.

21 *And this commandment have we from him, That he who loveth God love his brother also.* 21. Besides, he that is sincere obeys God in one command as well as in another; and it is plain God hath commanded the love of our neighbour as well as that of himself. Nay, he expects that we should make the love of our neighbour for his sake the evidence of our love to him.

COMMENT.

It hath been formerly observed, that this Epistle is probably thought to have been written with a particular view to the corruptions of the Gnostic heresy¹. Now among other abominations charged upon this sect, these are very remarkable: that they held it lawful to deny Christ in time of danger and persecution; and not only so, but that they even took part with the avowed enemies to the Christian faith, in persecuting those who steadfastly adhered to it. This gave occasion to the apostle to enlarge more particularly upon the two great duties of loving God and our brethren. And, because the party so scandalously defective in both these boasted extremely of the knowledge of God, and the indwelling of God, above the rate of common believers; St. John sets himself to shew how vain all such pretences are in them, whose temper and actions are so directly opposite to that God, who admits us to know him, with an intent to make us like him; and communicates the grace of his holy Spirit, to refresh that image which the depravation of human nature hath defaced in our hearts. And the inference he draws from hence is, that our perfection in both these regards ought to be judged and measured by the proportion of those good fruits and effects which they are found by experience to produce in us.

Concerning charity or love in general, I have heretofore discoursed largely, by explaining the nature and qualities of this virtue²; and by proving how necessary and mutual the dependency is between that required to God and that to our brethren. The excellence of that duty will meet with a full illustration in a place proper to it hereafter³. The reasonableness of being content to suffer any hardships for the sake of God and a good conscience, to which the wisdom of his providence shall see fit to expose us, hath likewise been con-

¹ Epistle for St. John's day.

² Epistle for Quinquagesima and Advent Sunday.

³ Gospel for the eighteenth Sunday after Trinity.

sidered^b. So that all left for me to discourse of upon the present occasion seems to be, the explaining some arguments peculiar to this place, by which St. John hath chosen to enforce the duty of charity, in the passage now before us; and which have not had so particular a consideration as the others mentioned before.

The point I mean chiefly to insist upon is, the obligation lying upon us to love one another, from the sense we ought to have of God's exceeding great love to us. In treating whereof, I shall endeavour in some measure to make you sensible, first, how deeply we stand engaged to charity upon this account; and secondly, how proper a method that charity is to express our gratitude due for it. In both particulars confining my discourse to the topics furnished by St. John in the passage now under consideration.

I. Our engagement upon the account of God's love to us will appear very great and very manifest, to any who shall consider, as he ought, the several circumstances intimated here which concur to magnify and illustrate it^c. Such are the several enhancements of this favour, so lately taken notice of, that I shall not here again need to repeat them: and therefore, to save the reader's and my own time, I will at present only observe the inferences naturally resulting from thence, as to the manner and objects of our charity, if we be, as we all ought to be, desirous in good earnest to imitate this love of God to mankind, in proper expressions of ours to one another.

Now first, the example teaches us not to think anything in our power too much, whereby we may contribute to the benefit of our brethren, whose necessities call for and are capable of relief by it. The only begotten Son of God was a gift of inestimable value, the noblest and most beneficial possible even for him, who is the fountain of all goodness, to bestow. That which justifies the persons to whom he was given, in a steadfast dependence upon the Giver for any supplies their occasions can ever require. In regard he, who so liberally gave the greatest good, cannot be reasonably supposed to grudge a less. And how high the obligation of this example lies upon us, I shall not need to say otherwise than by putting men in mind to what a point the apostle carries it in the third of this Epistle: *Hereby perceive we the love of God, because he laid down his life for us: and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren. But whose hath this world's good, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dicellecth the love of God in him?* That is, the evidences of God's love are so engaging, as even to render the sacrificing our lives for a greater and general good, a becoming instance of charity, for them who are zealous to imitate it in the just perfection. But if any, who ought not to refuse their very lives, shall yet be so sordid as not to impart their superfluities for the support of their brethren, whose hard case it is to want the necessaries of life, all the pretences made by such hardhearted wretches to the love of God are manifestly false and hypocritical.

2. Secondly. The end of God's giving his Son being to propitiate

^b Gospel for fifth Sunday after Epiphany; fifth Sunday in Lent.
Monday.

^c Gospel for Whit-

^d Ver. 16, 17.

for the sins of men, is a good intimation that we do then express our love to our brethren in the best and most Christian manner, when we most promote their spiritual and eternal good. The honour and advancement of the gospel by the influence of their examples who suffer for their constant adherence to the truth of it, is generally believed to be that *laying down our lives for the brethren*, to which St. John, in the place last cited, pronounces us obliged. Certain it is however, that, let the benefit of our charity light immediately upon what part of the receiver it will, the soul is that part to which it should principally be directed, and wherein it should centre at last. This gives a just preference to those good offices by which the ignorant are instructed, the weak assisted, the mistaken rectified in their judgment, the stupid awakened, the vicious reclaimed, and the obstinate humbled. This renders the admonitions of our teachers and friends, the corrections of parents and masters, and the discipline of the laws, not only necessary justice, but singular kindness and charity. And in general it may be said, that as the particular instances of our love must be regulated and determined by the circumstances and occasions of those who partake of it; so, of what kind soever those instances be, the comforts that are present and bodily are always so to be consulted as may prove most subservient to their future and spiritual advantage.

3. The example of God's love intimates to us, that we are by no means to confine our charity to them who have been kind to us, or deserved well of us; for *herein*, says the apostle, *is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us*. The persons profited by this love are sinners, the worst of men, the worst of enemies; and therefore none imitates this love, who is not ready, in all fitting occasions and instances, to extend it to every man, even enemies themselves. For the very worst of these cannot deserve so ill at ours as the very best of us have deserved at God's hands. It is true, indeed, God bears a very different sort of love to the good from that which he vouchsafes to have for the evil: and this pattern will justify some distinctions to be made between one man and another, both in the degree of our affection, and in the manner of our behaviour. But as his mercy is over all his works, and he hates nothing that he hath made, so must our charity reach all mankind, and utterly exclude none that are such, be the objections against them otherwise what they will.

And this leads me very naturally to consider in the

II. Second place, how proper a method this charity is for expressing our gratitude to God, who hath been so unspeakably kind to us. In order whereunto, this portion of Scripture furnishes the following arguments:

1. That we are in no condition of making suitable returns immediately to God himself. This I conceive to be the proper importance of those words at the 12th verse, *No man hath seen God at any time. If we love one another, God dwelleth in us, and his love is perfected in us*. That all good offices ought in some way or other to be acknowledged, no truly ingenious mind can be insensible. When therefore suitable returns cannot be made to the party who hath obliged us, our next

care is to express our obligations by placing them upon some others dear to him, and whose advantage will be kindly interpreted as if the thing had been done to himself. Such is the case before us. Our goods *'extend not unto God'*, but unto those they may and do who are his creatures, his children, who bear his image, and are his receivers here upon earth. And therefore, they who neglect to use the power they have of doing good to them whose benefit will be kindly accepted, are deservedly looked upon to be deficient in the disposition to do it at all. And it is highly probable, that were God himself in a condition of receiving or needing instances of their charity, they would be found altogether as backward in the exerting it towards him, as now they manifestly are toward his proxies and depositaries who actually do need it and are capable of it.

2. Imitation and a desire of likeness are natural and inseparable effects of love; and therefore the *†* apostle made use of a very proper motive to excite this affection to one another, when assuring us that love and goodness is the very essence of God: and that they who are not industrious to resemble him in this regard do manifestly betray an insensibility and disesteem of his divine excellencies; for which indeed there can be no excuse, because that love is the very thing by which they subsist; it comes home to the feeling of every man, and refreshes his memory with new instances every moment. So that not to consider and esteem and admire and copy after this excellence, is in effect to forget and to live without God in the world; nay, it is even, in the most brutish manner, to forget ourselves, and live in contradiction of the dictates of human nature. For,

3. Likeness and acquaintance naturally beget tenderness. From whence again it is that this virtue hath very powerful inducements to enforce it. Every other man is as it were an image and transcript of ourselves: the passions, the desires, the infirmities and necessities of human nature are the same in us all. And they who are so nearly allied in generals may be brought as near to one another in circumstances. So that, whatever the wants of any one man actually are, the same it is possible for those of any other man to be. This consideration is a mighty quickening to that fellow-feeling of other men's afflictions, which one would think could hardly be avoided by those to whom they are continually present; who cannot help seeing, and, if they have any humanity, must in some degree suffer with them. Besides, the affairs of this mortal state are so ordered, that, by a perpetual intercourse of offices and services, men are the next instruments of profit and delight to each other. And this begets kind resentments, not confined to those instruments alone, but to the whole species. For every individual either may, at some time and in some way we think not of, become such to us; or at least, he puts us in mind and awakens our grateful remembrances of them that already have been such. All which endearments have this mighty advantage of affecting us, that they are sensible and visible; and so fitted for those impressions by which, in the present state, a creature compounded of body as well as soul will find himself most powerfully wrought upon. Whereas the

love of God, though in itself infinitely greater than that of any or of all the men in the world can possibly be to us, yet, coming from a distant and invisible benefactor, requires some abstraction and train of thought and argument to possess us with due apprehensions of it. And hence it is that the apostle argues with some warmth, ver. 20, *If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar: for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen?*

Lastly, to all these motives the apostle adds that which alone ought to be sufficient; that the expressing our thanks and love to God in the manner I have been speaking of is exactly agreeable to his good pleasure, and the subject of a positive command. And such a command this is, as we may reasonably presume he will lay great stress upon, and require a strict account of; for none seems superior to it by all those marks which are usually thought to give one command a pre-eminence above the rest. None is more frequently and solemnly inculcated; there is none, the performance whereof is encouraged with more precious promises of ample rewards; none, whose neglect draws down more heavy punishment. Of the former we shall have other occasions to enlarge; of the last I am going to set before you a most memorable instance in the Gospel appointed for this day.

THE FIRST SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY.

THE GOSPEL. St. Luke xvi. 19.

19 *There was a certain rich man, which was clothed in purple and fine linen, and fared sumptuously every day:* 19. To the covetous Pharisees, who derided his former discourse upon works of charity, (see ver. 14,) our Lord proceeds to address himself by the following parable, *There was, &c.*

20 *And there was a certain beggar named Lazarus, which was laid at his gate, full of sores,*

21 *And desiring to be fed with the crumbs which fell from the rich man's table: moreover the dogs came and licked his sores.* 21. So helpless and friendless was he, that the dogs, &c.

22 *And it came to pass, that the beggar died, and was carried by the angels into Abraham's bosom: the rich man also died, and was buried;* 22. This man, worn away with misery and want, died; and was by angels conveyed into that happy place where the souls of the faithful are in rest and joy. That rich man died too, but there was an end of all his happiness.

23 *And in hell he lift up his eyes, being in torments, and seeth Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom.* 23. For he, being in the place where the souls of the wicked are after their departure out of the body, lifted—

hands, shall not escape severe punishment in another world. This argument is prosecuted from the nineteenth to the twenty-sixth verse inclusive.

Secondly, an intimation, that the sum of our duty is sufficiently notified in Scripture; that standing and ordinary methods are what men ought to be contented with, and such as will abundantly suffice for all who are disposed to make a right use of them. That there is no need of expresses from the other world to signify the condition of souls departed, and the rewards and punishments awaiting people there, according to their good or ill behaviour here: that God hath already done enough to reclaim men; and as he hath not obliged himself to more, so it is hard, if not impossible, to say what would prove effectual to those who stand out against the present evidence for religion and a future state. This seems to be the proper importance of that which passed between Abraham and the rich man: the request of sending Lazarus back to admonish his surviving brethren; and the denial of that request, as an expedient neither in itself just or reasonable to be granted, nor one whit more likely to succeed than the means of persuasion enjoyed already, if, as an act of extraordinary indulgence, the sending such a message should be granted.

I design this discourse shall be confined to the former of these subjects, by representing the same estate of those hardhearted wretches in the next world; who, when they have power and opportunities, refuse to do good in this world: and the blessed change which the poor and despised here make in the condition they enter upon there. This is described more particularly in the 23—26th verses; but that which I would principally insist upon is the substance of Abraham's answer in those remarkable words, *h Son, remember that thou in thy lifetime receivedst thy good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things: but now he is comforted, and thou art tormented.* The design of which answer is plainly to shew that God is just, nay, merciful, when in a future state (as in the case before us) the rich and vain pay so dear for their prosperity, and the poor and afflicted have so ample amends made them for the hardships and sufferings to which need and neglect had exposed them in the present state.

Now in order to a right understanding and due sense of this dispensation, the following particulars should be diligently observed:

1. First, that such changes of condition in a future state are by no means a necessary consequence of our different fortunes in this. Nor does the case in hand warrant us to infer, that every rich man here shall be *tormented*, or every poor man *comforted* hereafter. Dives had received his good things in his lifetime, but they were not the true cause of his torments after death: Lazarus had received evil things in his lifetime, but neither were they the cause of his comforts after death, if considered strictly and by themselves. The occasions indeed of each they were; but their being even so much as occasions was not a natural, but an accidental effect, and depended entirely upon the disposition and management of the parties concerned in them.

The rich man laid it on thick in purple and fine linen, in vanity and

pomp; but the vast sums thus squandered upon the extravagance of equipage and apparel, some part of them at least, had he so pleased, it is sure, might have been laid out in clothing the naked; and if he had done this in any becoming proportion, his riches could not have risen up in judgment against him. He decked his table too with costly provisions; and thus in riot and intemperance, (it is probable,) in splendid entertainments and superfluous delicacies, (it is certain,) he consumed those good creatures of God, which he, who had received so very freely, ought to have given freely. But he might, instead of, or even with, high eating have spared some little plain, and consequently cheap sustenance, to refresh those hungry bellies which were in effect charged upon him by that liberal Providence which brought them to want the supports of his overflowing plenty, and laid proper objects in his way to shed itself upon.

Nay, though we should admit the very best of the case, and better by much than this parable represents it; let us suppose him hospitable without luxury, and splendid without vanity, that both his attire and whole course of living were agreeable to the rules of decency and custom, and what the world would expect from his quality and estate: yet even thus were he very far from being without blame; for the poor have always a right to some part of the possessions of the rich. And if this man had not sinned in giving too much to himself, it is plain he sinned in giving too little to others, and worst of all in giving nothing to such an object as Lazarus. Purple and fine linen may no doubt be very innocent, but they can never be so to them who, without any manner of remorse, can see their brethren lie naked and shivering, and perish at their doors. A sumptuous table may be not only allowable, but often commendable, nay, sometimes necessary; but not to them who grudge the very *crumbs that fell from it* to those pined wretches whose necessities are so pressing, and their requests at the same time so modest, as to desire *crumbs* only for their comfort and relief.

This man then was punished, not for possessing much, no, nor for spending much, but for spending it in a wrong and an unprofitable way. He laid all out upon that which was superfluous, and neglected that which was necessary. His hand was always open to his own vanities, and always shut to the necessities of the poor. So far from retrenching one needless expense, as not to rescue a helpless wretch from perishing by that which could cost him nothing. Thus it was want of bowels that condemned Dives to hell, which had he had and exercised, the riches he enjoyed had become means of advancing him to a brighter crown in heaven. But riches ought not to be blamed for the abuses of them, for they are capable of being turned to good or evil purposes, just as the owners please. All this is clear from our Lord's description of the last general judgment. The goats on the left hand are supposed to have had the same abilities and opportunities of doing works of mercy with the sheep on the right, and both were equal so far as both were able; but the difference between them lay elsewhere. The sheep exerted their power gladly: they fed, and clothed, and visited the distressed members of Christ: and for so

doing they enter into life eternal. The goats did not make the like use of their power; and because they might have done the same good, but would not, therefore they are doomed to everlasting punishment.

Thus the case stands again with regard to Lazarus: had he murmured and blasphemed, or, for a present remedy, betaken himself to lying or forgery, to theft and pilfering, to tricking of creditors, or any of those base and wicked shifts which we so commonly see want drive men to, his evil here must have been worse hereafter. It was not poverty alone could carry him into Abraham's bosom; but poverty adorned with a mind and life strictly honest, a spirit meek and contented, resigned to God's disposals, and humbly trusting in his goodness for a recompense to be made in his due time. Many, no doubt, receive good things not in this life only, but in the next too; and many likewise receive evil things in both. Therefore when it is said, *Thou receivest good things, and Lazarus evil things*, it is neither said nor meant, that for their receiving them one was tormented now or the other comforted now; but those good things are brought to the rich man's remembrance, only that he might recollect and see and justify God's providence in all his dispensations: to make him sensible how largely even so ill a man had shared in the Divine bounty; and that those who have least of it in the next world cannot fairly complain that God is their debtor when the whole account is stated. And this is my

2. Second consideration for convincing the justice and the mercy of God in the case now before us. For he is certainly just who gives every one as much as his due; and he is certainly merciful who gives every one more than his due: and it is no less certain, that both these things are done as often as wicked men are prospered here and tormented hereafter, or good men afflicted here and comforted hereafter.

Among several arguments for satisfying our doubts with reference to the unequal distribution of temporal blessings, this has not the least weight; that no mere mortal is absolutely perfect, or even void of sin; and yet scarce any is so desperately abandoned neither, as not to have some commendable quality, some actions of a better kind, to temper and allay the venom of his bad ones. Now reason as well as religion instructs us, that it becomes a holy and just Judge to award a recompense in proportion to each man's deserts; so as that neither the wilful and open violation of his laws may pass unpunished, nor the observance of them lie overlooked and unrewarded. But then the same degrees of nicety and rigour are not alike necessary in both these dispensations. For in punishing, the penalty ought not to exceed what may justly be inflicted, because in such a case the sufferer would receive wrong. But in rewarding, the bounty may exceed the merits of the cause; and in remitting, the offender may be spared a part of what in strictness the judge could inflict; because mercy is the prerogative of a supreme Lawgiver, and neither the party nor any other person is properly injured by extending it.

Now *godliness*, we are taught, *is profitable for all things*: it serves every interest a good and wise man can have; as being encouraged

by the promises both of *this life that now is, and of that which is to come*. Whereas a vicious conversation is discountenanced by the threatenings of both these lives; so that God keeps his word, if he reward or punish men in either way or place, provided what he sends upon them in each kind be correspondent to their deserts and his own declarations. And of that we shall be able to make some tolerable judgment by applying these general rules of justice to the matter in hand, and setting the beggar in the parable as a specimen of good men afflicted here, but comforted hereafter; and the rich man, of wicked men prosperous here, but tormented hereafter.

Allowing then to Lazarus all the forementioned virtues for sanctifying his poverty, all that were possible to be attained and practised in those trying circumstances; yet Lazarus was a man, and of all men we know that they have *sinned and come short of the glory of God*, as of all sin we know that *the wages of it is death*; such death, as when opposed to eternal life, must mean a state of endless misery. If God then determine to punish for sin, is it not kind and gentle to accept a temporary pain, though this calamity be present, rather than to reserve men for an irremediable one, though that be distant and future? And if this man, who is an offender in some points, be excellently good in the main, yet shall he be no loser at last, nor have cause to think any of his good deeds neglected, provided effectual course be taken for amends to be made him in that unchangeable condition. Now of this we have positive assurance, not only from the estimate made by St. Paul, Rom. viii. 18, *I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that shall be revealed in us*; but more especially from that overruling goodness which, the same apostle observes, renders those sufferings instruments of our happiness. For this is our consolation, that *our affliction is light*, that it is but *for a moment*, that *the glory* designed for our retribution is *a weight, a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory*, and lastly, that that *light affliction* worketh out this *weight* for us. And is it not now sufficiently clear, that both the justice and mercy of God are magnified in that adversity of pious men, so largely paid, and improved to such vast account? nay, that even Lazarus, when thus *comforted*, had reason to think himself liberally dealt with, notwithstanding all the *evil things* he did or could receive in his lifetime?

Nor is the point less clear with respect to the other branch of the parable, wherein the rich sinner receives his good things in present, and his torments after death. For those torments are no more than the just hire of an ungodly life. The blessings of this life are promised indeed to virtue, but it is to the sincere pursuit and general practice of virtue. Where a very few good qualities happen so to mingle as to be vastly overpowered or outnumbered by bad, such promises cannot take place. If then upon persons who incur the punishment both of this and another state, those of another only are inflicted; this is an act of long-suffering: here are kind invitations to repentance, and warnings and opportunities multiplied for escaping the judgments of both states. Thus the evil they receive hereafter is what such men

have deserved; and the good they receive here is more than they deserved. This is bounty and mercy, and that, to be sure, is justice: especially when the neglect and abuse of mercy add to the measure of their crimes and condemnation. All which, as it is agreeable to the reason of the thing, so some have thought implied in the original ἀπέλαβες. That word implying to receive, not so properly in the quality of a gift, as of a payment; and that each of the parties to whom it is referred had the utmost they could demand, or with any manner of title expect.

3. Thirdly, there seems to be somewhat of a peculiar force in that expression, *thy good things*; that is, such as thou didst esteem good, and prefer above all others. For wicked and worldly men set their hearts upon the present, and contemn, and even hold in derision, all future advantages. So that God proceeds with such people, not only in the method of justice, strictly considered, but he complies with their own wishes and inclinations, and pays them such coin as themselves choose to be paid in. If at the summing up of the account, this be found not to answer expectation, they have none but their own folly to thank for it, which, in despite of all warning to the contrary, will make a losing bargain, and place their principal happiness where it is not to be found. But with how ill a grace does any man complain for being taken at his word, and call it hard to miss of that feboity which himself hath obstinately thrust away from himself? Thus Dives valued wealth and worldly magnificence, and the pleasures of flesh and sense, far before all the blisses and glories of heaven; and he enjoyed the fortune he would have carved for himself, his *good things in his lifetime*. Lazarus, on the other hand, was content to undergo the hardships of unpitied poverty and affliction, in prospect of a recompense after death: and God gratified him in that better thing which he had chosen; and the event proved that he chose wisely, and had not trusted, nor submitted, nor suffered in vain.

The main point resulting from this passage being by this time, I hope, sufficiently proved, as to the justice and mercy of God in distributing the blessings and punishments of this and a future state, I proceed, in the second place, to leave it upon you with some seasonable inferences, and so conclude.

First then, we learn from hence, what mistaken measures they go upon, who form a judgment of their own or another's happiness and misery by their different fortunes or stations in the world. For, according to this standard, who would have scrupled to pronounce the rich man in this parable most blessed, and Lazarus the wretchedest of all mortal creatures? And yet how distant had this rash sentence been from the truth of the case! Alas! *the fashion*, says St. Paul, (or, as the original hath it, *the scene*) *of this world passeth away*¹. And an errant scene it is indeed; a mere theatrical representation, all over delusion and deceit. Upon this stage of life we see, we admire, we envy, a person supporting the character of a prince: we put his splendour, his retinue, his wealth, his power, and large dependencies into the idea of the man; but when the curtain is let down, and death

shall (as long it cannot be before it will) disrobe him, and strip off all that borrowed lustre; this sets us right, and disambushes those false imaginations with which the solemn pageantry of forms, the glitterings of greatness, and the distance of universal obeisance and respect, had blinded us before. It is then we see the man as he is; and till this change be made, we judge in the dark; for he alone is great, whose naked virtue merits our esteem. He alone rich, who is so towards God, and in good works. He only happy, who shines by his own light. A light, not like the squanderer's, that dazzles men's eyes a while, and sets in utter darkness; but which, like that of Lazarus, rises from the midst of obscurity, grows strong and bright, and, when eclipsed by death, emerges from the grave into perfect and eternal day.

2. Secondly, here is comfort and encouragement for those of our brethren whose circumstances are strait and low in the world. This passage shews they shall not always be forgotten; but if their poverty be sustained with patience and contentedness, and trust in a good God, there is a time coming when he will not neglect them, though men may. And they who so haughtily and coldly look down upon their suffering in the mean while may one day find cause to envy their happiness. For when the gay but fleeting vanities of this world shall be reduced to a coffin and a shroud, when pomp and honour vanish like a shadow, when proud-hearted wealth lies covered in the dust, the pity, or the scorn and curse of survivors; then shall the godly poor be taken up by angels, and carried into rest from grief and labour, to mansions of peace and joy and glory everlasting.

Let this then, my friends and brethren on whom the world hath frowned, let this support your spirits and soften all your difficulties and toils, that God hath chosen the honest and pious poor for his own; and, provided they be rich in faith and virtue, without any distinction of quality or fortune here, hath made them equal to the greatest of the sons of men, and vested them in the same title to the same inheritance, and to every precious promise, which his blessed gospel hath any where made to them who best love and are best beloved by him.

3. But above all, in the third place, the rich should take this warning to use their plenty wisely and profitably, lest either their luxury and vanities, if it be employed amiss, or the intemperate love and rust of this talent, if not employed at all, be a witness against them in the last day. This parable casts no reproach upon the rich man for raising his estate by unjust and fraudulent methods, or for not paying punctually for all his gay clothing and sumptuous table. And yet, supposing him the fairest dealer that ever lived, this single fault of hardheartedness, and not distributing to the necessities of the poor, was sufficient to consign him to the flames of hell. So true it is, that they who fall into temptation by wealth perish by a snare of their own laying; and that it is not money, but the *love* and the abuse of *money*, which is *the root of all evil*! For good this may do much; much to other people, more to the owners; and therefore they who have the power and means must look well to it that the inclination be not wanting.

Which want must indeed be inexcusable, especially when such opportunities for improving, and such objects for inviting the exercise of this noble grace of charity are plentifully and perpetually offering themselves.

If then your riches and the glory of your houses be increased, remember how this scripture reminds you, that you *can carry nothing away with you when you die, neither shall one whit of your pomp follow you.* If any, like another rich man in this ^m Gospel, be in perplexity and doubt where to bestow his fruits and his goods, let him reflect upon the application. Thence he will learn, how little need there is to pull down his barns and build greater, when so many large and safe storehouses stand ready provided to his hands, where he may bestow, where he may lay them up for many years, nay, where he may put them out to the most growing interest, with a most infallible security to the principal. For by these good works it is that men escape the condemnation of the rich man now before us. Which God give us grace to do for his sake, who himself vouchsafed to *become poor*, that *we by his poverty might be made rich*, Jesus Christ our Lord; to whom, with the Father and the Holy Spirit, be all honour and glory, now and for ever. Amen.

THE SECOND SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY.

THE COLLECT.

O Lord, who never failest to help and govern ^athem whom thou dost bring up in thy steadfast fear and love; Keep us, we beseech thee, under the protection of thy good providence, and make us to have a perpetual fear and love of thy holy name; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

THE EPISTLE. 1 St. John iii. 13.

13 *Marvel not, my brethren, if the world hate you.* 13. By what was said of Cain's hatred to Abel, and the occasion of it, you may learn not to think it new or strange, if wicked men hate you, notwithstanding, or even upon the account of, your piety and virtue.

14 *We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren. He that loveth not his brother abideth in death.* 14, 15. Meanwhile, as charity in us is an evidence of our regenerate state, so is such malice in them as

15 *Whosoever hateth his brother is a murderer: and ye know that no murderer hath eternal life abiding in him.* sure a mark of their being still in an unregenerate and damnable state. Every

^m Luke xii. 16.

^a Psalm ix. 10; xxxiv. 18, 20; xxxi. 23, 24.

spiteful man being, in the eye of God (who judges every one by the disposition of his heart, and not by outward acts only), a murderer.

16 *Hereby perceive we the love of God, because he laid down his life for us: and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren.* 16, 17. See Comment on Epistle for first Sunday after Trinity.

17 *But whose hath this world's good, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him?*

18 *My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth.* 18. The love we are bound to must not consist, and therefore must not rest, in its sincerity by action. See James ii. 14, 17.

19 *And hereby we know that we are of the truth, and shall assure our hearts before him.* 19, 20. This will render us acceptable to God, who is not to be imposed upon by false pretences, but knows us more perfectly than we do ourselves. (See vol. i. p. 61, 62.)

20 *For if our heart condemn us, God is greater than our heart, and knoweth all things.*

21 *Beloved, if our heart condemn us not, then have we confidence toward God.* 21, 22. Yet if we are not conscious of any insincerity, this will justify our dependence upon his favour and goodness, and readiness to hear and answer our prayers.

22 *And whatsoever we ask, we receive of him, because we keep his commandments, and do those things that are pleasing in his sight.*

23 *And this is his commandment, That we should believe on the name of his Son Jesus Christ, and love one another, as he gave us commandment.* 23. For, in short, true faith and true charity are the sum of that duty he requires from us.

24 *And he that keepeth his commandments dwelleth in him, and he in him. And hereby we know that he abideth in us, by the Spirit which he hath given us.*

COMMENT.

The predictions of our blessed Lord, concerning the fierce and implacable hatred which his disciples should after his departure succeed to, and be conformed to his image and sufferings in, this apostle lived to see accomplished, in a long course of persecutions, carried on by the most united malice that ever the world saw any instance of. And in regard to persons conscious of their own innocence, and universal good-will to mankind, a treatment so unworthy might be matter of astonishment; St. John does^b here, after his Master's example, intimate, that there was nothing in all this, all circumstances considered, which was disagreeable, either to the nature of things or the cha-

^b See John xv. 18-26.

racter of those who were guilty of such barbarities. The relation these disciples bore to Jesus Christ, their engaging in the same cause of piety and truth, practising the same virtues of meekness and constancy, of purity and true charity, were intimations sufficient for them to prepare for the same treatment with him who had in his own person left them an example. An example of enduring evil, no less than of doing well, in the discharge of his ministry, and of the many invidious, but yet necessary offices, that must naturally follow thereupon.

St. Peter, it is true, asked that question, *Who is he that will harm you, if ye be followers of that which is good?* meaning, that it is very unreasonable any one should; and that if any thing can, virtue will certainly be a sure, at least it is the best, defence men are capable of providing to themselves against the insults and injuries of malicious wicked people. That they who make it the great business of their lives to give offence justly to none, and quietly to put up all that hath been (though never, so unjustly) given them, should not be suffered to live at their ease: that men, who abstract themselves, as much as may be, from this world and its advantages; and consequently never interfere in those interests and pursuits which occasion the eagerest emulations and bitterest enmities between rivals jealous and envious of each other, where the success of one party is always a disappointment or loss to the rest of the pretenders: that in this case, I say, men should not be content to let them alone, whose aim and endeavour and utmost zeal are directed to such objects only, as they who give them most uneasiness despise and refuse, or perhaps disbelieve and scoff at: that they, who omitted nothing proper to engage the affections of all men, and were ready to sacrifice their very lives for the common good, should be repaid with contradiction and calumny, with bitterness and spite; is what in reason may appear monstrous and impracticable. But reason supposes men to act upon principles, and to weigh things in a just balance. Whereas fact demonstrates, that passion and corruption are the measures they generally and chiefly proceed upon. These expect to be soothed and flattered, even in their vices and follies. They disdain that which is indeed the true and only way of doing them service; and never esteem themselves served, except in a way of their own choice and liking. To this depravation it is that all the persecutions of our blessed Lord and his disciples must be imputed. They were reckoned and treated as enemies by them to whom they told the truth. Truths which, because in themselves necessary and profitable, their character obliged them undauntedly to publish; but withal truths, which, because they lay cross to the errors and passions of a sinful world, the prejudices and vices encountered by them had rendered of all others most unacceptable.

The preachers then and ministers of our Saviour and his blessed gospel were as so many champions, set in the forefront of the battle. But, though the heat of the action would lie chiefly upon these, yet Christians, even of the meanest and most private capacity, would all

be sure to find their part in it. Unlikeness of principles and practices does naturally beget coldness, and coldness tends to alienate our affections. And an immoderate fondness for, and impatience of contradiction to, our own opinions and manners, are generally seen to abound most, and carry the point highest, where men are most in the wrong. How therefore could it be, that a sort of persons should be well with the world, whose doctrines and judgment, whose ends and actions, were so perfectly different from theirs? whose faith taught its professors to forsake and despise those objects, which all who did not profess it did most passionately love and pursue! in a word, whose innocence and purity, and truly wise behaviour, was a continual reproof and manifest condemnation to the folly of those sordid and sensual lusts, which the so much greater part of mankind sought happiness by indulging without any control?

Supposing therefore, as is most reasonable, that St. John addresses himself to good Christians at large, it is evident they all stood in need of being fortified against a calamity which all would be called to suffer.

And though, when the reason of things is abstractedly considered, there might appear no danger of a malice perfectly undeserved; yet when it is considered how mankind are used to act when reason is borne down by the corruptions of prejudice and passion, the case becomes very different. For then the not deserving hardships and ill treatment may turn to an accidental occasion of exasperating some sort of people the more, and even increase those outrages and sufferings which it ought effectually to prevent.

Meanwhile, how black a guilt such malice draws upon the party envenomed with it, this short account of the matter sufficiently discovers. But the method and arguments used by this apostle are such as enforce the duty and the necessity of charity to the highest degree, and ought by no means to be passed over without our particular consideration.

That the doing despite to good men, merely on the account of their being good, was no new or surprising thing, he had shewed by calling to mind an instance of it almost as old as the world itself. The cruelty and unnatural murder committed by Cain upon his brother Abel was a famous type of the Christian blood to be shed in great abundance, upon no other provocation but that of the persecutors being evil, and the sufferers righteous. But in the managing of this argument, he draws it to an inference not confined to the hatred of evil men to good only, nor to persecution and death only. No. He extends it to any one man hating any other; to the inward resentment as well as to the outward act. For so I take his meaning, where loving the brethren is made the known distinction of a truly regenerate Christian, or *“passing from death unto life: where they who do it not are declared out of a state of salvation, or “to abide in death: and where the sentence of murder, and eternal damnation consequent upon it, is pronounced upon every one that hateth his brother. All which, in the strictest interpretation of the words, we shall find*

exactly agreeable to our Lord's own declarations in the case, when instancing in such resentments as are inconsistent with the righteousness required from his disciples, and the commonly neglected expressions of anger as violations of the sixth commandment. The reasonableness of which (seemingly perhaps hard) determinations, (having already treated of the other particulars most remarkable in this exhortation to universal charity,) it may be of some importance to take this opportunity for explaining.

To this purpose it were easy to shew the manifold mischiefs which would unavoidably destroy the happiness and order of society and mankind, were the least indulgence allowed to so restless and unreasonable a passion as this of hatred; and consequently, how far that law would be from doing its business, which makes the happiness and security of the world one main end of its institution, and yet should leave any seeds of contention uncondemned. But that I wave at present: and will restrain my thoughts now to the case as it stands with regard to a man's own conscience and Almighty God. Supposing all the while that I am reasoning with those who profess at least to make the Christian religion the rule of conscience and standard of obedience.

Now the design of this religion is plainly to change and purify men's minds; to carry righteousness and charity in thither, that it may not content itself with forms and outward show, but entirely possess and effectually influence the whole man. Charity, we are told in this Scripture, must never rest in the thoughts and affections of the soul. But how shall it exert itself in becoming words and actions, and *love in deed and in truth*, unless it first be planted, and have taken strong root there? When these thoughts are corrupt, the fountain of action is embittered and polluted; and he who thinks and wishes ill is uncharitable and unchristian, as well as he who speaks and acts so. Men may attain to such government of their passions as to stifle and hinder the flame from breaking out; but they who suffer them to burn within must not presume themselves to be innocent. They may value their wisdom upon such occasions; but that which in these restraints is wisdom falls far short of duty, and must by no means pass for true religion. For God is a God of spirits, and the tribunal of Christ much unlike those upon earth, which can take cognizance of overt acts only. He understands our most secret intentions, and judges men according to their wills. The good we would do, but cannot, shall be rewarded; and the evil we are disposed to do, though not actually done, shall be punished. Hence, if a man keep malice, though but in his heart; if he wish or rejoice at the misery or harm of his brother, this man is, in the eye of God and of the gospel dispensation, *a murderer*.

And thus his conscience will tell him that in right and good reason it ought to be. For whoever shall sit down and argue the matter coolly and fairly with himself shall certainly find the resolution of his own mind turn at last after this manner. That which I desire may happen, and take satisfaction in seeing done by another hand, what principle is it that keeps me from inflicting with my own? If some

sudden change befalls my neighbour's fortunes, the diminution of his honour or estate, the blemishing his credit and reputation, and I feel a secret pleasure in such calamities; can it be charity that ties up my tongue from bitterness and slander, or my hands from invasion and cruelty? No certainly. He that triumphs in mischief, and does not act it himself; he that is fond of and cherishes a scandal, but forbears to raise or spread it; it is not religion, but some other consideration, by which even this man is restrained. But, alas! how few are there, in comparison, who think themselves bound to stop here! How few, who, while they hold their hands from actions, yet make no scruple to give their tongues a liberty of speaking *all words that may do hurts*, and so contribute to the disgrace and grief of their injured or afflicted brother! And if they with these sharp razors wound and mangle a bleeding reputation, would not the same malice unsheath their sword and thrust it into his bowels, if their own safety, the fear of human laws, or some other prudential consideration, did not bind their hands, which leaves their tongues and thoughts at liberty? For were religion, were the fear and love of God their check, this would prevent the very beginnings of malice. This tells us that we must be compassionate and kind, that we must do to every other man whatsoever we would that he should do to us; that but to meditate or delight in evil is a sin; and that no instance of goodness should be wanting, which the circumstances of any brother render seasonable for him to receive, and ours have put it in our power to give: that a design of making him uneasy is not one whit less murderous and guilty, because not prosecuted in tenderness to one's self, and not to be effected with impunity. Thus God interprets it, and by this rule he will proceed with us; for he declares himself a trier of the heart, and that in our last great reckoning *every secret thing shall be brought into judgment* ^b.

As therefore the former consideration upon this portion of Scripture should support and fortify good men in their duty, when they meet with unsuitable and unworthy returns from an injurious and wicked world; so should this latter be a warning to us, not to give way to the least motions toward an uncharitable disposition. The former case hath the justice, the goodness, and the unchangeable promises of God, the examples of the blessed Jesus himself, of his apostles and disciples, saints and glorified spirits innumerable, and the sweet satisfactions of a clear conscience, for its comfort and encouragement. The latter hath the instance of Cain, the dreadful guilt of all whose malice renders them his cursed seed, the sentence of the Divine law, and the severity of a Judge from whom no secrets are hid; as so many monuments of justice, and sure indications of condemnation and severe vengeance for its terror and scourge. Let us not therefore be weary of well-doing, how ill soever our good actions are received, because there is a time coming when we shall certainly reap, if we faint not. And let us not cherish any thought of the least tendency toward uncharitableness or malice, remembering that our very inclination and desire lie open to him with whom we have to do; and that, if we

could in this matter deceive and mock even our consciences, yet cannot He be mocked, who (as we read to-day) *is greater than our hearts, and knoweth all things.*

THE SECOND SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY.

THE GOSPEL. St. Luke xiv. 16.

16 *A certain man made a great supper, and bade many :*

17 *And sent his servant at supper time to say to them that were bidden, Come ; for all things are now ready.*

18 *And they all with one consent began to make excuse. The first said unto him, I have bought a piece of ground, and I must needs go and see it : I pray thee have me excused.*

19 *And another said, I have bought five yokes of oxen, and I go to prove them : I pray thee have me excused.*

20 *And another said, I have married a wife, and therefore I cannot come.*

21 *So that servant came, and shewed his lord these things. Then the master of the house being angry said to his servant, Go out quickly into the streets and lanes of the city, and bring in hither the poor, and the maimed, and the halt, and the blind.*

22 *And the servant said, Lord, it is done as thou hast commanded, and yet there is room.*

23 *And the lord said unto the servant, Go out into the highways and hedges, and compel them to come in, that my house may be filled.*

24 *For I say unto you, That none of those men which were bidden shall taste of my supper.*

17. Compare this parable with that of St. Matthew xxii. 2, &c.

COMMENT.

Of many reasons, which might induce our blessed Saviour so frequently to deliver himself in parables, none seems to have been had more in his view, than that of gaining hereby an opportunity for insinuating unwelcome truths in the most inoffensive manner. To this the figurative style of parables did much contribute. It naturally engaged attention ; it avoided all that harshness of reproof, which plain and simpler language would have had ; it appealed to and left the matter with the sense of the hearers ; and it turned off the invidious

part of drawing the parallel, and making the application upon the parties themselves.

No subject of which our Lord was concerned to inform the persons with whom he conversed required this guard and caution more than the rejection of the Jews, and call of the Gentiles into the church. Now this was an event, not only fit to have warning given of it, but to be foretold in such a manner, as might at the same time intimate the justice of God, and lay the blame of the privileges lost by it upon the losers themselves. The disposing those Pharisees to whom he then addressed himself, patiently to hear his discourse upon so tender a point, moved him to represent it by parable. And the design of rendering them sensible, how obstinately that once peculiar people of God had withstood their own mercy, and provoked him to take such measures, moved him to choose the circumstances of this parable in particular.

Upon our Lord's declaration, that the acts of friendship and kindness done to persons in no condition of making suitable returns shall *be recompensed at the resurrection of the just*, one of the company that *sat at meat with him* took occasion to say, *Blessed is he that shall eat bread in the kingdom of God*. An expression probably in use among the Jews, to denote the delights and enjoyments they expected by the promised Messiah. This metaphor our Lord so continues, as to compare the advantages of that kingdom, and the extent of them, to a sumptuous *entertainment*, to which great numbers were invited^k; and then he shews how very different notions the greatest part of the *guests* thus bidden had, from that judgment which this person had justly made of the matter. For, though at supper-time they received fresh and more pressing invitations, yet did they all slight the kindness and the cost, and with very frivolous excuses unworthily absented themselves. The master of the house hereupon gives orders to call in all those of meaner quality throughout the whole city^m. And, in regard the plenty of his provision was sufficient for a still *larger company*, he despatched another message to the highways and hedges, to fetch in all the outliers, and fill his houseⁿ. Expressing at once his goodness to these who had not, and his just resentment of the rude *refusals* of them who had, been so graciously bidden before.

Now, by comparing this with a passage elsewhere of very close affinity to it, we may see evident reason to conclude, that *the kingdom of heaven*, that is, the gospel dispensation, was represented by it. This, as ministering true plenty and pleasure, all that men can want, all that they can wish, to render them perfectly happy, is compared to a *supper*. The bounty and infinite love of Almighty God are signified by the *greatness* of that *supper*, and the multitudes bidden to it. The first bidding denotes all the previous notices of the Messiah, by which the law and the prophets were intended to prepare the Jews for receiving him and his doctrine. The second bidding, when all things were ready, seems to import all that Jesus did and taught and suffered for their conversion and salvation, and all the testimonies and importunate exhortations of his apostles and disciples to the same

^k Luke xiv. 14. ^h Ver. 15. ⁱ Ver. 16. ^k Ver. 17, 18. ^l Ver. 19, 20.
^m Ver. 21. ⁿ Ver. 22. ^o Ver. 23. ^p Ver. 24. ^q Matt. xxii. 2.

purpose. The excuses sent for their absence are those prejudices and passions and worldly interests, which did not only hinder those Jews from coming into the faith, but disposed them to treat all attempts to win them over with the most inflexible obstinacy and utmost contempt. The guests brought in from abroad to supply their places are the Gentile world, to whom, after the Jews had thrust it from them, the subsequent tenders of this grace and salvation were made. And the declaring that *none of those men which were bidden should taste of this supper* implies the giving those Jews over to a reprobate sense, and leaving them under that infidelity and perverseness, in which they continue hardened to this very day.

Such is the analogy, no doubt, of the parable here before us. But, though its primary intention be what you have seen, with regard to the different entertainment which the gospel found at its first settling out, yet have we a part and concern in it also. For by the same reason that they who would not receive it at all were punished for their refusal, shall every Christian who professes to have received it, if he be slothful or lukewarm in the duties of that profession, be punished for his indifference and neglect. I have formerly, indeed frequently, said enough to shew, that a bare acknowledgment and belief of our Saviour's doctrine is far from answering the ends of it to us. And I think I may venture to say, that they who *hold the truth in unrighteousness* hold it more by chance than by choice. For the same seducements which now obstruct their practice would, if they had been born and educated in any other persuasion, most probably have obstructed their belief of the Christian religion.

The ministers of God's holy word and sacraments are the servants sent out to invite to this supper. Faith cometh by preaching, but if faith do not produce a life of piety and virtue agreeable to its principles, our preaching is vain, and your faith is also vain. They therefore, upon whom the name of Christ is called, are not thereby quite beyond reach of the true import of this parable. They may still retain the vicious dispositions reprehended in it; they consequently may incur the sentence of exclusion denounced in the close of it. They actually do the one, and will certainly fall under the other, if they suffer the cares or the pleasures of this world to draw them into an indifference for or neglect of the duties of religion, and the concerns of eternity. And therefore it shall be my present endeavour to make some observations on this passage, which may prove, and I hope (by God's blessing) prevent, the folly and sin and misery of so doing.

To make this appear as plainly, and yet as briefly as I can, some things shall be observed on the bidder's part, and some on the persons that are bidden.

I. On the bidder's part, first, we shall do well to observe the condition of the person; who, though not described here by any title of distinction, is yet, in another place of like importance and design, set forth under the character of a king. And this speaks his marvellous kindness and condescension, which indeed is yet infinitely more amazing, when we remember that the great and glorious God is meant by

that king, and that wretched sinful mankind are the guests invited to partake of this supper.

2. The plenty and costliness of which supper is next to be considered; expressed in St. Matthew by his *oxen and fatchings being killed*; and by its being not a common entertainment, but a *marriage feast*. Most significant intimations both of the invaluable mercy hereby figured, the redemption of the world by the Son of God. This Son of that great King did, in unspeakable humility and love, vouchsafe to espouse his church, to join himself to human nature, to put on all its necessary frailties and infirmities, to endure its wants and pains, that so he might exalt those, whose flesh and blood he took part of, to his own perfect bliss and glorious kingdom. The vast expense that king was pleased to be at, though it could not be better, is yet but poorly resembled, by killing the choicest of his herds and flocks: for (oh unspeakable bounty!) God spared not even his own Son, but delivered him up for us all; gave him to a life of poverty and affliction, contradiction and contempt; to a death of shame and torture inexpressible, that his crucified body might give life unto the world.

3. The extent of which benefit is a third remark proper under this head. He *bade many*, he provided indeed for all, and hath bidden all, though not all at the same time or exactly in the same manner. And thus much is expressly affirmed by the apostle concerning that mystery of love intended by this supper, that *“by the grace of God Jesus Christ was made lower than the angels, that he should taste death for every man.* And therefore we should by all means attend.

Fourthly, to the great care taken for rendering the effect of this benefit as universal as the design of it. In this indeed some order was observed, by giving earlier notice to some than others. To the Jews this redemption was many ways prefigured and foretold; in their country and neighbourhood the Messiah made his constant abode, scattered his instruction, wrought his miracles, offered his bloody sacrifice, celebrated his glorious conquest over death, and made his triumphant ascent into heaven. There the apostles first published these glad tidings. All which took off any just imputation of God's peculiar being neglected. But the message which began was never designed to end there. The commission of these inviters ran in the most general terms, *Go ye out into all the world, preach the gospel to every creature, baptize all nations*¹. These are the methods whereby those circumstances in the parable are answered, of *going out into the streets and lanes of the city*, and then *to the highways and hedges*, and as these diligent searches and repeated importunities by his servants testify the earnestness of their Lord's desire that his house might be filled, so are the due notices and constant awakenings of the ministers of the gospel a sufficient evidence of God's good-will to mankind in general. Which is the argument used by St. Paul, when he says, that *“God would have all men to be saved, and to come to the knowledge of the truth.*

Thus on the bidder's part every circumstance conspires to magnify his condescension and bounty, and vehement desires of a general

¹ Heb. ii. 9.

² Mark xvi. 13.

³ 1 Tim. ii. 4.

good. All which must be of equal weight and force to aggravate the guilt and unworthiness of as many as refuse so gracious offers made to them. Which yet is rendered much more heinous and unpardonable upon the following accounts :

1. The nature and meaning of the supper to which they are invited. Concerning this the parable insinuates, that it was an honour and privilege worthy to be preferred far above any of those considerations whereby men were detained from it. But in the application, it is their greatest, their only happiness, "*for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby they must be saved*, but only the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. And we know no other way of being saved by him, but that of being careful to live up to the principles of his most holy religion, and approving ourselves virtuous in our behaviour, as well as orthodox in our belief.

2. The quality of the excuses made to vindicate their absenting. Now these are such avocations as in themselves are lawful and innocent. They are not vicious in the nature of the things, and yet they are extremely so, in regard of that better thing to which they were unduly preferred, and so became an obstruction to it. Many things there are so vile and abominable, that no allowance must in any case be given to them : but these may be not only allowable, but even commendable pursuits, in proper time and place and measure. And yet our ruin from them is inevitable, when we give them too large a scope, and suffer them to take off our esteem and our endeavours from the concerns of our souls, and the business of religion.

3. The condemnation pronounced upon these refusers shows their misery and exclusion to have been their own act and deed. And that neither the master of the feast was wanting in any advances becoming him to make ; nor they in any degree excusable, notwithstanding any the most specious apologies, that were or could possibly be made for themselves.

And this brings my argument to the point I have all along been driving at: by showing the insufficiency of those pretences with which so many souls are deluded into sin and eternal destruction, upon occasion of the cares and profits and pleasures of the present world. They imagine that while those cares are determined to lawful objects, such as a competent provision for their own and their family's subsistence ; that provided their profits are honest, and what the world in the way of commerce and dealing counts justifiable and fair ; that so long as their pleasures are not manifestly sinful, but keep clear of riot and lewdness, sensuality and brutishness ; all is safe and well, and that God cannot be displeased, nor their salvation brought into any manner of hazard. They are far from supposing that God is to have no part of their time and thoughts, but they presume he will be content with such a proportion of it, as the condition of their affairs leaves them leisure for. They confess too, that self-denial is a Christian virtue ; but they think this denial sufficiently exercised, by confining themselves to such satisfactions and delights as neither the natural nor the written law of God hath forbidden as sinful and impure.

But, for any thing that appears to the contrary, had not these absenters from the feast before us all this to allege in their own vindication? How then came they to suffer so heavy a sentence? The purchasing of land and viewing it so bought, the providing yokes of oxen and proving them, the marriage of a wife, are all of them blameless actions as any whatsoever. And yet each of them becomes highly blamable when made a cause of not coming to this supper. God by his providence hath obliged us to an honest industry and concern for them, who, because they derive their persons and being from us, have a right to depend upon a subsistence from us too. He hath also declared that man *worse than an infidel who provides not for his own, and especially for them of his own house*; he hath intimated, that *fathers ought to lay up for their children*¹: but he hath likewise declared, that neither father nor mother, nor wife nor children, nor lands, nor life, nor any thing, must be loved in comparison of him; that be the cares that cumber us what they will, still there is *one thing needful*, that must least of all be neglected: nay, that the neglect of this endangers the loss of the rest, for he hath promised too for our encouragement, that if we *seek first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness, all these things shall be added unto us*.

The reason then of this condemnation plainly lies here, that the men concluded under it were so keenly set upon the world, that for the sake of that they chose to forego all the advantages of the gospel. *They made light of it*, says St. Matthew, and therefore *went their way, one to his farm, another to his merchandise*. Because these lay uppermost in their hearts, they had no value, either for the promises of grace here, or glory hereafter. And this indeed is the danger of eagerness in such pursuits, that objects in themselves innocent are apt to transport us to a degree of desire and complacency, which, by diminishing our zeal for better things, ceases to be innocent. The enjoyments that are sensible and present, if not very nicely guarded, will naturally gain ground, and steal away the affections of a creature compounded of body as well as soul. And by the same proportions that the present gain, the future and spiritual will lose the ascendant in our thoughts. Of this ascendant are to be understood those texts of scripture which forbid us to love the world, and command us to give the whole of our love to God. Not that we are to like or love nothing but him; for of such abstractedness our condition is not capable; but we are not to love any thing in comparison of him, or let any thing come in competition with him. And of this we are to give evidence by renouncing what would be most agreeable and beneficial to our present circumstances, when either the attaining it, if as yet we have it not, or the keeping it, if already in our possession, becomes inconsistent with duty and a good conscience. In short, God expects always to reign supreme, and that we seek and use and enjoy the world with such temper and resignation, as never either to transgress his laws, or to murmur at his providence, however we and our affairs shall be disposed of by him.

¹ 1 Tim. v. 8; 2 Cor. xii. 14; Luke xiv. 26.

² Matt. vi. 33.

³ Luke x. 41, 42.

⁴ Ch. xxii. 5.

Let us not therefore imagine that there is any inconsistency between those precepts which command us to be industrious and careful for our own families, and those which command us to serve and love God only. For it is not by prayer and hearing and reading and sacraments alone that he is served and loved, but by an honest diligence in our respective capacities and callings, by every thing that makes us useful to our relations and the world, nay, even by our pleasures and diversions, when all these are so ordered and restrained as to express an infinitely higher regard to him; when no pleasure or profit they can bring abates the concern we are required to have for our duty, but even the provision for our body and its delights, instead of swallowing up, is made constantly subservient to the care for our souls.

What hath been argued upon this occasion our own reason cannot but give in to. For who that understands and believes the gospel at all can think that any allurements here below can deserve to be put into the balance with the joys of eternity? who can deny their damnation to be most just, whose pretended multitude of business will not allow them leisure to be saved? or suppose that God is not most highly provoked by making religion a thing by the by, and fit to be attended then only when they have nothing else to do? especially when this matter is so tempered as not to intrench upon any decent and necessary care, as not to require the tradesman to forsake his shop, or the husbandman his labour, but to require *mercy rather than sacrifice*, and that men should follow their employments in such Christian manner, as even by them to serve themselves and God too.

He who is careful to do this, according to the rules just now laid down, can never be unqualified to approach his God and Saviour in the most solemn ordinances. And he who is not careful so to do, it is not the leisure nor the devotions of a day, or a week, or a month, that can qualify him for such approaches. From whence you see how vain and frivolous those pretences must needs be, by which too many think to justify their neglect, as of religious duties in general, so of the sacrament of the Lord's supper in particular. Since an honest and good man, how close soever he follows worldly business, is always fit, and he who is not such is never fit, to communicate. To them (and they, God knows, are many) who deceive their own souls with this fond pretence, I cannot better address myself than in those words of our most excellent church, which have a special regard to the scripture now in hand: "Ye know how grievous and unkind a thing it is, when a man hath prepared a rich feast, decked his table with all kind of provision, so that there lacketh nothing but the guests to sit down, and yet they who are called (without any cause) most unthankfully refuse to come. Which of you in such a case would not be moved? Who would not think a great injury and wrong done unto him? Wherefore, most dearly beloved in Christ, take ye good heed, lest ye, withdrawing yourselves from this holy supper, provoke God's indignation against you. It is an easy matter for a man to say, I will not communicate, because I am otherwise hindered with worldly business. But such excuses are not so easily accepted and allowed before God.... When God calleth you, are ye not ashamed to say ye will not

come?....They that refused the feast in the gospel, because they had bought a farm, or would try their yokes of oxen, or because they were married, were not so excused, but counted unworthy of the heavenly feast." This, with more of like importance, which I earnestly recommend to my reader's most serious consideration, we have in the second exhortation in our Communion Service; expressed in terms of piety and affection befitting the best and tenderest of mothers, the church of England: which God give us all grace heartily to unite in and steadfastly adhere to, for Jesus Christ his sake. Amen.

THE THIRD SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY.

THE COLLECT.

O LORD, we beseech thee mercifully to hear us; and grant that we, to whom thou hast given an hearty desire to pray, may by thy mighty aid be defended and comforted in all dangers and adversities; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

THE EPISTLE. 1 St. Peter v. 5.

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| <p>5 <i>All of you be subject one to another, and be clothed with humility: for God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble.</i></p> <p>6 <i>Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time:</i></p> <p>7 <i>Casting all your care upon him; for he careth for you.</i></p> <p>8 <i>Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour:</i></p> <p>9 <i>Whom resist steadfast in the faith, knowing that the same afflictions are accomplished in your brethren that are in the world.</i></p> | <p>5. Be obedient to superiors and condescending to all, for these are virtues particularly favoured by God; as pride, their opposite vice, is particularly hateful in his sight.</p> <p>6. Let this humility be the rather exercised, that it may produce patience, a virtue necessary for the calamitous times now approaching.</p> <p>7. In the midst of which rely entirely upon the wisdom and good providence of God. For he will not leave you destitute of proper succours and comforts.</p> <p>8. Be always upon your guard, and awake, for your enemy is so, and in persecuting times he is like to attack you more fiercely, to terrify you, if possible, out of your duty.</p> <p>9. But if you maintain your ground by faith, he can get no advantage over you: and you have less reason to give way, when you recollect that persecution is a case common to Christians everywhere.</p> |
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10 *But the God of all grace, who hath called us unto his eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after that ye have suffered a while, make you perfect, stablish, strengthen, settle you.*

11 *To him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen.*

COMMENT.

THE first words of this ^a Epistle are capable of a twofold meaning. They are by some understood to enjoin that deference due to spiritual pastors and governors: and thus the connexion of St. Peter's discourse here is very natural and close from the beginning of the chapter. In this sense the term *one another* means only the different degrees or orders of the persons to whom that respect and submission is accordingly due in different instances and proportions. And for this sense of the Greek word ἀλλήλοις these interpreters think they have St. James's authority; who, when he exhorts men to ^b *confess their faults one to another*, cannot well be supposed to intend all sorts of persons without discrimination, but those only to whom such confessions were proper to be made, the persons injured, or their spiritual guides.

Others extend the words a great deal farther, and interpret them of all those good offices of courteous behaviour and condescension and charity, which are so far from obliging with regard to superiors only, that equals and inferiors have a right to them. Thus rendering the subjection mentioned here mutual and voluntary; and, as they conceive, most agreeable to the following expression of being *clothed with humility*. Upon either of these senses there can be little need of enlargement in this place. For what concerns the former hath been already touched upon in the Gospel for the first Sunday after Easter^c. And our engagements in respect of the latter were, I hope, sufficiently explained and proved from the Epistle of the second Sunday after Epiphany^d, upon those words of St. Paul, *In honour preferring one another; be of the same mind one toward another; mind not high things, but condescend to men of low estate.*

The original word ἐγκυβέσασθε, which we render *be clothed*, is of peculiar elegance, signifying properly an upper garment, girt about over the rest, and such a one as some critics have observed to be a distinction of servants. Hereby then the apostle hath been thought to intimate that *humility* ought to be always visible in Christians, in every action of our lives to express itself, and to be a significant mark of our belonging and retaining to Christ. Concerning the excellency of this virtue in general, and the obligation to it from our blessed Saviour's example, something hath been already, and more will be spoken in due time and place^e. At present the consideration fit to be chiefly insisted upon is its necessity and usefulness in afflicted circumstances, such as the apostle is here describing, and supporting the persons under to whom this Epistle is addressed.

^a Ver. 5.

^b Ch. v. 16.

^c See above, p. 14.

^d See vol. i. p. 293.

^e Epistle for Sunday before Easter, Gospel for the eleventh Sunday after Trinity.

Now that humility is of singular benefit at such a time especially is very evident, whether we regard the duties mentioned here before or after this exhortation; those we owe to our brethren, or those to Almighty God. In respect of the former, it is the most effectual expedient for containing every man within his own sphere, for securing the deference and submission due to superiors of every sort and capacity, and so for preserving inviolate the order and unity and peace of the church; the consequences of disturbing which are at all times full of danger and mischief, but most eminently and manifestly so in a season of public calamity, and when a common enemy threatens us with destruction. This virtue likewise, above any other, disposes men to be liberal in those mutual comforts and assistances which in times of hazard and difficulty are most wanted and most welcome. But especially this virtue is of mighty service for preparing men to receive from the hands of God any events his wisdom shall think fit to send with a becoming resignation of mind. For indeed, it principally consists in right notions of God and of ourselves. How infinitely great and wise and good and just he is, and how vile and poor and miserable and sinful we are: how absolute his right and dominion is over us as creatures, and how just his chastisements, nay, how gentle even the most grievous of this present state must needs be when inflicted upon sinners. These reflections thoroughly fixed in men's minds are the only foundation upon which a true patience and contentedness can be built. And they are the proper way of doing him honour when his rod is upon us; of producing that fruit of holiness and amendment which is the end afflictions are designed to compass; and consequently they are the best inducement to take off his heavy hand, when the corrections of it have thus accomplished their work. Hence the apostle observes, that God *resists*, or, as the word more properly signifies, sets himself in battle array against *the proud*. The vindication of his honour requiring that he should assert it against every bold invader, and make them who rebel and contemn so great a Majesty know to their cost how vain and how hazardous an attempt it is, to arrogate more to themselves and pay less to him than is really due. Hence again we are encouraged to *humble ourselves under the mighty hand of God*, by a prospect of his *exalting us in due time*. It being agreeable to the methods of the Divine justice and providence, in some very remarkable and exemplary manner to distinguish and reward that patience and constancy which is content, not only to endure the sharpest, but to acquiesce in the longest of adversities; to refer themselves entirely to God's wisdom for their support under, and to his leisure for their deliverance out of them. In a word, his glory is magnified by reducing ourselves in our own opinions to that which we really are by nature and by sin. This is a sort of undoing again that crime and corruption, in which the affectation of being more than God had made them involved our first parents and their depraved posterity. This therefore renders us greatest, and something indeed in God's eyes, when we are least, and nothing in our own.

That ^h *care*, which the apostle would have persons under hardships

cast entirely upon God, is, no doubt, that anxious and disquieting solicitude which distracts the mind, perplexes all our thoughts, breaks and confounds all our measures, and so not only does more hurt than good, but betrays a want of consideration and religion, and seems to say, that the providence of God over all his creatures, and his tender concern for the faithful in particular, make none or much too feeble impression upon our souls. Of this I shall hereafter have occasion to enlarge; meanwhile, that it is no part of the apostle's intent, to set aside all such regular and prudent care for our own preservation as may consist with a Christian dependence upon the Divine wisdom and goodness, is manifest from his proceeding to enjoin sobriety and watchfulness, faith, and the contemplation of the like sufferings in our brethren, as fit and necessary duties and remedies for a state of persecution, or any other kind of distress.

By *sobriety* (I have¹ formerly observed) is meant, not only a temperate use of the creatures appointed for our sustenance and refreshment, but the government of our passions and desires in general, with respect to any objects or events whatsoever, which in the present life are wont to provoke them to violence and excess. Without sobriety, in the former sense, watchfulness is impossible; for nothing beats the powers of the soul off their guard, reduces us to a state of thoughtlessness and inactivity, and sets open the door to all manner of temptations, nay, even furnishes matter for those temptations to work upon, like gluttony and drunkenness, sensuality and love of pleasure. But sobriety, in the latter and more extended sense also, becomes necessary in order to patience and perseverance under afflictions; as it passes a right estimate upon the things of the world, and gives us a becoming indifference for them, in comparison of those better advantages to which the very want or deprivation of these is capable of becoming highly instrumental. And let a man's behaviour be never so regular, and his life never so abstemious, till he arrive at this moderation in his passions and desires, the different events of life may still upset him. In truth, one great end of sobriety in the former is to work our minds up to it in this latter respect. And abstinence from meats and drinks hath by no means done its business till the accustoming ourselves in that one instance hath enabled us to gain the mastery over our appetites and affections in any other instance whatsoever, when occasion shall require the exercise of this government.

By *watchfulness*, no question, is meant a continual circumspection and care that we be not surprised, either through our own neglect, or the infirmities of our nature. And what excuse can be found for those spiritual sluggards who fold their hands to sleep in profound security, when warned that they have an enemy to encounter, who is always awake and keen upon his prey—a *roaring lion*, whose malice is implacable, and a continual walker about to devour, whose endeavours for their ruin have no abatement or intermission!

This is the general acceptation of the word, which yet here may

¹ Gospel for the fifteenth Sunday after Trinity.

^k Ver. 8, 9.

^l Epistle for Sunday after Ascension.

perhaps have a view somewhat more particular and restrained. That branch, I mean, of watchfulness which considers and is aware of what importance the different events of this life are to the happiness or misery of the next; and what advantages the enemy of souls is ever taking to convert them to our destruction. Sometimes insinuating and deceiving by flattery and false friendship, so turning the serpent into a beauteous seraph; sometimes again disheartening and terrifying with the grim visage and loud yellings of a lion; alluring us into his ambush by the stratagems of pleasure and prosperity, or bidding us open battle by drawing up against us all his artillery of sufferings and crosses.

In this encounter, ^m St. Peter tells us, all we have to do is stoutly to stand our ground, supported by a vigorous faith, and animated by the examples of other good Christians engaged in the same cause, and pressed with the same difficulties. ⁿ Of both which helps, and the power of them, the course of this work hath led me to treat very lately.

After these seasonable admonitions, the apostle concludes with a prayer, which does so implore the good effects, as at the same time to suggest that they are the certain comforts and consequences, of afflictions rightly undergone. That these are every way consistent with the gracious design of making good men eternally happy; that they are but of short continuance, that they add lustre to such men's virtue, inflame their zeal, fix their resolution, qualify them for greater undertakings, render them at last impregnable; and by conforming them to the likeness of a suffering, resemble them in the end to the triumphs of a victorious Redeemer. But till this be, (which if we do not obstruct our own happiness will not fail to be,) let us remember, that we are creatures and servants, and he our Maker and Lord; consequently that to us belongs submission and obedience and fidelity, to him *power and glory and dominion for ever and ever.* Amen.

THE THIRD SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY.

THE GOSPEL. St. Luke xv. 1.

1 *Then drew near unto him all the publicans and sinners for to hear him.* 1. Many persons of ill fame and profligate conversation, desirous of instruction, expressed their inclination to repent and amend, by putting themselves in the way of our Lord's discourses, which might assist them in those good intentions.

2 *And the Pharisees and scribes murmured, saying, This man receiveth sinners, and eateth with them.* 2. The easy access and favourable reception afforded to these men, the Pharisees and scribes, according to their usual superciliousness, expressed themselves offended with.

3 *And he spake this parable unto them, saying,* 3. Our Lord therefore vindicates his conduct in

^m Ver. 9.

ⁿ Epistle for first Sunday after Easter.

this particular by the two following parables. The design whereof being to prove that the conversion of wicked sinners is highly acceptable to God, the inference from thence is, that the opportunities allowed for bringing that effect about ought not to be grudged by or displeasing to men.

4 *What man of you, having an hundred sheep, if he lose one of them, doth not leave the ninety and nine in the wilderness, and go after that which is lost, until he find it?* 4 For the equity of which proceeding he appeals to their own practice and sense, in matters of much less importance, in the following manner.

5 *And when he hath found it, he layeth it on his shoulders, rejoicing.*

6 *And when he cometh home, he calleth together his friends and neighbours, saying unto them, Rejoice with me; for I have found my sheep which was lost.*

7 *I say unto you, that likewise joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine just persons, which need no repentance.*

8 *Either what woman having ten pieces of silver, if she lose one piece, doth not light a candle, and sweep the house, and seek diligently till she find it?*

9 *And when she hath found it, she calleth her friends and her neighbours together, saying, Rejoice with me; for I have found the piece which I had lost.*

10 *Likewise, I say unto you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth.*

COMMENT.

THE similitudes whereof this portion of scripture principally consists are in substance and design as nearly related as are the applications of them at the seventh and tenth verses. And those you find in terms to be almost the same. The former is that of one sheep lost, the latter that of one piece of money missing out of many. Each of these being sought with much care and pains is found at last, with a transport of joy proportionable to the solicitude for its loss, and the diligence employed for retrieving it. The sinner, in the application, answers to that sheep and that piece of money. The repentance of the sinner to the finding either of these. And from the sensible pleasure which men are used to feel and express upon such occasions, we are directed to conclude the degree of that satisfaction which such repentance brings to God and the blessed spirits above. *I say unto you, that likewise joy shall be in heaven* (says the seventh verse), or (as the tenth), *there is joy in the presence of the angels of God, over one sinner that repenteth.* To which the seventh verse adds, *more than over ninety and nine just persons which need no repentance.*

The use I design to make of this passage is, to lay down and explain the arguments it ministers to wicked men for repentance and amendment of life. For in this sense no doubt it was intended to encourage and support those publicans and sinners who at " this time drew nigh in great numbers to hear Jesus.

Now by comparing the applications with their respective allusions which went before, those arguments will appear to be principally the three that follow.

1. First. The miserable condition of a loose and profligate sinner before repentance. This is easy to be gathered from the comparisons chosen to represent him, both which denote the desperateness of such men's circumstances; for they are *a lost sheep* and *a lost piece of money*.

By the former of these, *a lost sheep*, is intimated the heedlessness and folly of a course of wickedness. The danger of this sheep becoming a prey to every beast of rapine or deceit, to that *roaring lion* in particular, which (the Epistle for this day reminds us) *walketh about continually, seeking whom he may devour*: and not only so, but the stupidity, the perseverance in this wandering, and the want of will or of power to come back again. And such in truth is the condition of people addicted to vice, when they have broken out of God's fold, and forsaken the pleasant pastures he provided for them. They grow careless and inconsiderate, are exposed to and overtaken by snares and temptations every moment: they are hardened by custom, are depraved in their affections and judgment, are neither disposed to grow wiser, nor of themselves capable of conquering inveterate habits of evil, though they should now and then shew some good inclination to attempt it.

By the latter of these comparisons, *a lost piece of money*, we are given to understand, that God esteems the souls of men precious, and reckons them among his wealth and his treasures. And his indeed they are, made and formed by his own hand, impressed with his own image and superscription; and from that stamp, which carries a resemblance to the great King of the whole world, deriving all their currency and value. But when they abandon God's laws, and forsake the divine and rational life, a life of goodness and wisdom renounced for one of sensuality and madness and mischief, then they are lost; lost to themselves, lost to God: then this coin is debased, the impress obliterated and gone; and that piece of money, as to all the worth and use of it, in a manner as if it were no longer in being.

It may not be amiss, upon this occasion, to take a short view of those several expressions in scripture by which the Holy Ghost hath thought fit to describe the wretched estate of the persons we are speaking of. Now this is done by *stumbling* and *falling*, by *blindness* and *darkness*, by *insensibility* and *the profoundest sleep*, by *fears* and *terrors*, by *wounds* and *bruises*, by *putrefaction* and *sickness* and *death*. The end of this variety of terms is to denote the confusion and the rashness, the ignorance and the folly, the painfulness and despair of an ungodly life; the wild mazes and endless labyrinths which sin entangles men in; the rocks and precipices it thrusts them upon; the sottishness of a debauched understanding, the headiness of

a seared mind, the stings and agonies of a reproaching conscience, the smart of guilt, and amazing apprehensions of vengeance, which the wicked are possessed, are perplexed, are haunted with: the enfeebling of the soul, and disabling its noblest faculties, and (with regard to any thing that is good) the unactive, the noisome, the irrecoverable misery sin reduces these carcasses of men to. Such is the unhappy, the impotent, the forlorn, the lost condition of all who have cast off the regards for God and goodness, leaped over the bounds and burst through the fences which should have preserved them in order and obedience, and let themselves loose to appetite and lust, to obey sin in its inclinations and suggestions without thought or control.

II. A second encouragement to repentance contained here is from the means whereby sinners attain to it, corresponding to the mighty industry used for recovering that stray sheep and lost piece of money. Now repentance must always bear proportion to the guilt repented of. And because every man's misfortune of this kind is not equal, therefore the word *repentance* must needs admit of different senses, and the thing itself of different degrees.

Some measure of it every one is obliged to, because none lives without frequent failings, and many, many infirmities. A lamenting of and striving against these, a being sorry for several things that have been done, and heartily wishing them undone again, an indignation against and detestation of our past negligences and miscarriages, are duties from which the very best of men cannot be exempted; because the very best of men have in some, in a world of instances (God knows), done amiss, and dealt wickedly.

But they whom the Scripture generally, and this portion of it in particular, characterises by the name of *sinners*, are the habitual and the obdurate, the gross and eminent offenders; and these have a much harder task to go through. Theirs must be a total change of heart and conversation, a renewal of mind and affections, a recovery from mortal sickness, and a rising from death and corruption. All which are manifestly out of a man's own power; for, as the resemblances mentioned under my last head speak the misery, so do both those and these import the disability, of them whose unhappiness it hath been to fall into so deplorable a state. The wandering sheep is supposed not to return of itself, nor the piece of money ever to be found, except the owner search for it. And hence our blessed Saviour, whose great design it was to reclaim and turn men away from their iniquities, does so often distinguish himself by the titles of a *physician* to distempered souls, and one *who came to seek and to save that which was lost* 9.

This then is a support to dejected sinners, that the good Shepherd follows his stragglers into the mountains and the deserts: that this careful woman sweeps the house, and searches diligently for the piece when it is scattered or mislaid. In short, that their merciful Redeemer is content to be eyes to the blind and feet to the lame, by cherishing and assisting their inclinations to do better. All in effect left for these spiritual impotents to do, is to ask and receive grace and strength,

and to make use of it when given; to be satisfied with reconciliation and forgiveness, and not turn their backs upon their own mercy; to accept happiness when offered, and be glad of being found when their Master seeks them; to return to peace and safety at the Shepherd's call; to lie in his bosom and rejoice with him, when he vouchsafes to bring them back, pleased with the burden, and transported at the recovery. Which leads me to the

III. Third and last encouragement here, the joy this conversion is said to create. A joy like those in the two parables, which expresses itself very sensibly, and is diffused abroad among multitudes who have a concern for the penitent's happiness and God's glory. All heaven feels and is full of it. *“Likewise I say unto you, there shall be joy in heaven, in the presence of the angels of God, over one sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine just persons which need no repentance.”* For the right understanding this joy some caution must be used, which I shall therefore, after the example of some learned and great names, explain as clearly and as briefly as I can.

1. First, for the object of this joy, the repentance of a sinner, that it should affect angels, and God too, may very justly seem strange. And yet that so it does we have good authority to believe, from the words of our blessed Saviour just now recited, and from the correspondence of the two applications to their respective similitudes. For there the possessor, who recovered his loss, can mean none but God; as the friends and neighbours, to whom such joy is communicated, must in all reason denote the blessed angels and spirits that bear a part in this general gladness above.

2. But then, is it not yet more strange that the degree of joy should be so intense upon this occasion? that one such reformed wretch should raise it above the safety of many souls who never fell so foully, nor provoked any contrary passion so highly? that the ninety-nine sheep which never strayed should excite less of it than one poor silly wanderer? And yet that thus in fact it is we are assured, from the following parable of the returning prodigal, from the rest of the flock being left behind in the wilderness, and from the express application of our blessed Master; for he, as we have seen, makes no difficulty to affirm the joy in heaven to be greater upon the account of one such instance of a reclaimed penitent, than for a great many who, having never been so bad, never stood in need of so strict and painful a repentance. These circumstances, and the reason of them, deserve our very serious attention.

1. Now as to the angels, although we are but little acquainted with their condition and the ingredients of their happiness, yet thus much the scripture hath informed us concerning them, that *“they are ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation;”* that children, both in the natural and spiritual capacity, have those which are styled their *angels*. Those spirits then may very reasonably, and seem generally to be thought full of tenderness for their charge, solicitous for their particular safety, and extremely glad of any good that befalls them. How these heavenly hosts were affected with

the salvation of mankind in general, is evident from the hymn with which they attended at the birth of Christ to welcome him into the world^t. As also from their constant earnest desire of contemplating the mystery of our redemption^v. Every occasion then of this kind may be glad tidings to them; and though their nature be far distant from us mortals, and their bliss exquisite, beyond what we are able to conceive, yet, in regard both their nature and their bliss are finite, their joy may certainly admit of an increase; and as often as a sinner is converted from the evil of his ways, there may spring up a fresh object, and a large and literal addition to it.

But can this properly be said of God too, whose perfection of happiness allows no such accumulations? No doubtless: and therefore with respect to him we must interpret this, as religion and reason oblige us to understand many like passages where human parts and passions are attributed to him. All which is done that by such condescending resemblances he might the better manifest himself to the weakness of our capacities. As therefore the Holy Ghost, meaning to represent his displeasure and our baseness, does it by saying, that we *provoke him to anger, kindle his fury, grieve and weary his spirit*, and the like; so here, by saying that God *rejoiceth* over a repenting sinner, is intended that such repentance is highly agreeable to him. And were his nature capable of the same unequal motions with ours, the joy of a father, or a friend, for retrieving the person he loves best, and had been most in pain for, would be but a feeble and very faint image of that satisfaction which this excites in him, who loves us better than the tenderest parent or most affectionate friend upon earth does or can do.

But still it may be urged, why so partial in this love? why the *fatted calf killed* for the prodigal, when he who paid a constant duty to his father never had so much as a *kid given him* to make merry with his friends? If some, nay, if great joy be just for one, yet ought it to be greater for one than for ninety and nine?—for one once bad, than for so many always good? Or shall we say, it is better to sin and afterwards repent, than not to sin so as shall need such repentance at all! This difficulty still remains to be considered.

Now we are to remember God hath declared, *All souls are mine, the soul that sinneth it shall die*^u. Implying, that all mankind are by nature equally related to God, and that the distinctions he makes between one man and another are upon the account of virtue and vice. If then the stray sheep be sought, and the rest in appearance neglected in the mean while, it is not that the Shepherd hath a particular fondness for that sheep above the rest, for he would have done the same for any of them under the same circumstances. Judge by yourselves. When one child in a family is sick, does a tender mother watch with this alone because she loves it most? No, but because, as matters then stand, this requires her care most. So again, when that care hath been successful, the joy rises in proportion to the fears and hazards now got over. The father's reply in the end of this chapter^x comes home to our case: *Son, thou art ever with me, and all*

^t Luke ii. 14.^v 1 Pet. i. 12.^u Ezek. xviii. 4.^x Ver. 31, 32.

that I have is thine. It was meet that we should make merry and be glad: for this thy brother was dead, and is alive again; and was lost, and is found.

Therefore, neither is this part to be too rigorously understood, but as spoken after the manner of men; and the resentments of men are evidently raised by the greatness of a change from the contrary. Thus sickness and pain and danger give a more sprightly relish of safety and ease and health. The surprise of an escape which we did not expect, and the regaining of a treasure we had given for gone, is entertained with transport and rapture, because this gives it us afresh; it is a kind of new accession to our fortunes, and like a thing we never enjoyed before. And such is the case of men immersed in a dissolute and debauched life; an ample subject of pleasure and even of wonder, when they are *recovered from the snare of the devil*, who were long used to be *taken captive by him at his will*^u. This is a new conquest, an enlarging of Christ's dominion, an addition made to the number of the blessed, and an example of noble influence for encouraging others to shake off their chains.

Some other reasons might be alleged, but I confine myself to this, because it alone seems sufficiently to answer the extent and design of the parables before us.

Thus we have considered the joy in heaven over a repenting sinner; how it is to be understood, and how deservedly this occasion calls for it. And what can more encourage to repentance than these considerations? How could men indeed hold out in their folly and perverseness, did they but in good earnest attend to them? When St. Paul exhorts the Philippians * to virtue, he begs them to comply for his sake, and that they would *fulfil his joy*. And certainly some regard is due to them who labour for and watch over your souls, to let them reap this comfort, this fruit at least, of seeing that their endeavours to do good have not been all in vain. But at present this is a mean enforcement, and I do not say to the sinner, *Fulfil our joy*, but, *Fulfil the joy of God and his holy angels*. For God and his holy angels will applaud your change, and triumph in your deliverance. They are so zealously concerned for, so tenderly affected with your happiness, that no comparison, no passion of the like kind upon earth can equal the ravishing sense of it.

If the apprehension of misery in present, and the certainty of worse hereafter, than any in present can be, will awaken you, reflect seriously upon my first argument, your sad and desperate condition. Desperate if continued in, and impossible to be forsaken by your own single strength.

But then remember, secondly, that there is one at hand who will carry you on his shoulders, and vanquish all difficulties, if you will but concur in working out this freedom from bondage, and accept of a rescue from destruction. And is it possible men should be fond of ruin? When calamities lie heavy, nothing, one would think, should detain any in that state, but the impossibility of throwing off the load. Now even that objection is removed, and the sinner's escape does not

^u 2 Tim. ii. 26.

* Ch. li. 2.

stick there. His Shepherd seeks him, and wishes he would be found. He need but consent to be happy, and the work is done. The making of his fortune is put in his own power, and the securing not his own only.

But, thirdly, the diffusing a participation of his joy through a whole world of glorified spirits. He may make heaven yet more heaven by doing a thing so very delightful to God and all the inhabitants there, that the tenderest terms are not thought too expressive of their solicitude for his danger, of their desire of his good, and of their pleasure in his salvation.

So blessed a thing it is to return to our fold, to restore to Christ that treasure which he bought at the expense of his own blood. Oh let him have the benefit of his purchase, and suffer not the price of that life to be lost, nor that blood to be spilt in vain, as to your own particular!

To conclude in a word. Joy there will be somewhere, let us act how we please. Only it is at our choice, whether this shall be the joy of devils insulting us in torments, or the joy of God and angels congratulating their own and our unspeakable felicity to endless ages. And the odds between these is so great, the difference so plain, that if we had not to deal with a generation that have no knowledge, it might look like an affront to the common sense of mankind, to desire that they would *advise and see which of the two they will choose, that God may do it unto them.*

THE FOURTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY.

THE COLLECT.

O God, the protector of all that trust in thee, without whom nothing is strong, nothing is holy^a; Increase and multiply upon us thy mercy; that, thou being our ruler and guide, we may so pass through things temporal, that we finally lose not the things eternal: Grant this, O heavenly Father, for Jesus Christ's sake our Lord. Amen.

THE EPISTLE. Rom. viii. 18.

18 *For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us.*

prospect of that glorious reward to be hereafter obtained, and to which they bear no manner of proportion.

19 *For the earnest expectation of the creature waiteth for the manifestation of the sons of God.*

18. The sufferings I mention (ver. 17), how sharp soever, are yet rendered very supportable by the certain

19. For this, which shall one day prove us to be the sons of an immortal God, mankind in general eagerly expect.

^a Psalm xxxvii. 39, 40; John xv. 4, 5; 2 Cor. iii. 5. iv. 18.

20 *For the creature was made subject to vanity, not willingly, but by reason of him who hath subjected the same in hope,* 20. For all mankind is become liable to corruption, not by choice, but through the just dispensation of God who hath inflicted death upon them: yet this not without end or hope:

21 *Because the creature itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God.* 21. For a time is coming, when this death shall be succeeded by a happy immortality, and this effect of Adam's sin taken off from his posterity.

22 *For we know that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now.* 22. The sense and burden whereof at present lies so heavy, that the apprehensions of it, and the afflictions of the present life, are like so many labour-throes and pangs toward that better life.

23 *And not only they, but ourselves also, which have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body.* 23. Of which we, who have received the gospel and grace of Christ, have likewise our share; and with great earnestness do long for the evidence and completion of our sonship, even the final rescuing of these mortal and now afflicted bodies from death and corruption, and their admission into our eternal inheritance with Christ, in the kingdom of his and our Father.

COMMENT.

I shall not trouble my reader with the great variety of constructions which learned men have put upon this scripture; but having in my paraphrase set down that which, in my apprehension, is as reasonable and as natural as any, will endeavour to render it plain and useful by discoursing briefly upon it.

Not to look back into the foregoing parts of this chapter, (the connexion whereof I shall shortly be obliged to consider^b,) let it suffice to observe, that upon mention of our being *joint heirs with Christ*, the apostle signified, that being likewise *joint sufferers* with him is a condition of obtaining that inheritance; which being a privilege distant and unseen, and so under some disadvantage when put into the balance with afflictions sensible and present, St. Paul does here prove the reasonableness of being well content with submitting to this condition by several arguments:

1. First, from his own authority and certain knowledge; for that word, *c I reckon*, is not, as we sometimes use it in our language, a form of speech importing some remains of doubting, or the giving an opinion cautiously, with a reserve of deference for others of a different judgment, but it carries the signification of a persuasion as strong and peremptory as can possibly be entertained. It implies the having stated an account, considered all matters nicely; the sufferings, the very worst of this present time, on the one part, the glory, the not yet revealed glory, on the other part: and, after all reasonable allowances

^b Epistle for eighth Sunday after Trinity.

^c λογίζομαι.

and deductions made upon a fair and exact computation of the whole, St. Paul pronounces the latter so vastly to exceed the former, that it is an indignity done to it so much as to name them together, or to suppose a proportion between them capable of forming a comparison upon.

It is true, this glory is not yet *revealed* in us; we neither enjoy it, nor have a distinct and adequate notion of it. But I have^d shewed long since, that this is far from any argument for abating our value of or cooling our zeal in the pursuit after it. We know it is prepared, and we may know that its excellence and our infirmities are the true reasons why we continue so much in the dark about it. We know that it is perfect, that it is all and above all that can be wished or thought; whereas our present sufferings are partial, and never destitute of some allay to or support under them. In a word, we know that this is uninterrupted and eternal; but experience plainly demonstrates that most of our sufferings have comfortable intervals, and that all we can possibly suffer must quickly have an end.

These considerations alone do more than suffice to justify the apostle's estimate now before us; but he proceeds to make it good, Secondly, by the common sense and wants of mankind in general. This seems to be the meaning of the four following verses; *the manifestation of the sons of God* denoting that resurrection of the body, and immortality of the whole man, which is a privilege entirely owing to Christ, and an operation effected by the power of that Almighty Spirit that raised him from the dead. And though it cannot be affirmed that all mankind have constantly and every where entertained a firm and positive persuasion of such an immortality, yet have some dark and indistinct presages of and wishes for it been so general as justly to be esteemed a dictate of nature. And the more careful men have been to cultivate and improve the principles of reason, the more vigorous and lively have such impressions been upon their minds. This is abundantly manifest from the writings of some who never enjoyed the benefit of revealed religion; and consequently, who could not be led into such expectations by those prejudices of education, to which too many, who wrongfully usurp that name, are not ashamed to attribute the Christian's hope of a future state. They rightly observed, that the soul of man gave many indications of a principle nobler than matter. They considered how far short any enjoyments attainable in this life are of satisfying the largeness of its capacities and desires. They felt a continual inclination within to look beyond the narrow limits of duration to which its present abode in the body is manifestly restrained. They saw and lamented the mixture, the very unequal mixture of bitter cast into every man's cup; and from hence they were apt to conclude, that God had some better thing in reserve for so excellent a creature, and that his wisdom and goodness would never have endued him with qualifications for an happiness peculiar to a rational being, without some provision for his attainment of it. And therefore, though they could not account for the manner and circumstances of the thing, yet they supported themselves under all

temporal evils with the thought of some amends to be made their virtue and patience ; amends which experience convinced them good men could not depend upon here : and so the same arguments which persuaded them of the congruity of such a recompense were so many presumptions and evidences of another state, wherein they were to expect and receive them in full payment. These seem to be the *earnest longings*, the melancholy sense of their *bondage to corruption*, the *hopes of liberty*, the *groanings and travailings in pain*, meant by St. Paul in the scripture now before us. All of considerable weight in this subject of a happiness to come, by which *the sufferings of this present time* should be amply compensated. But all these receive a vast addition of strength from a

II. Second argument, added at the twenty-third verse ; which is, the concurrence of Christians in the same opinions and vehement expectations. *And not only they, but ourselves also, &c.* One great design of the gospel was to rectify our notions of things, to set the judgment right in points of speculation, and to direct the affections and desires to objects which were not only in being, but had an excellence and tendency to our happiness worthy of our love and pursuit. Hence it is easy to distinguish what apprehensions and appetites were really from pure nature, and what crept in and prevailed upon the depravation of nature. Of the latter sort are those which the gospel hath condemned as false and groundless, or any where forbidden as vicious and hurtful. Of the former, we may depend, are all such as the gospel hath explained more clearly, confirmed more fully, or enforced more advantageously. For revelation and natural reason are both from God, they are two different methods only of signifying his will and truth to us ; and therefore, when Scripture bears testimony to any opinion suggested by reason before, this gives it a fresh evidence and sanction, and shews it to have been a *plant of our heavenly Father's planting*.

It was therefore for St. Paul's purpose to prove this to have been the case with a future state, and the blissful rewards of it, that even the heathens were not destitute of some apprehensions and expectations of it ; and that *the life and immortality*, of which they had some faint glimpses only, *Jesus Christ hath now by the gospel fully brought to light*. That *the graces and illuminations of the Spirit* produce the same longings and groanings with the impressions of true original nature. Nay, that these are more vehement in proportion to the increase of the knowledge and assurance we now have ; that very Spirit being a mark of our sonship and earnest of our inheritance ; a *firstfruit* ensuring and representing the plenteous harvest which they who *faint not* nor give out from labouring will not fail *in due time to reap* ; and consequently *the glory that shall be revealed* is a most powerful argument for enduring with constancy and meekness *those sufferings of this present time*, to which, how sharp soever, that is so infinitely an overbalance, as, upon a fair and due calculation, to be injured and dishonoured by being so much as brought into any comparison with them. God grant us grace to consult, not our duty only, but our interest and happiness, by seriously laying to heart this vast inequality.

Which would not only soften, and support us under, any afflictions that can possibly befall us, but curb and conquer that slavish fear of death, of all passions the most tyrannical and tormenting; a passion, that nothing but this persuasion thoroughly imbibed can be a match for, by enabling us to conquer it as Christians, though we cannot wholly suppress and remove it as men.

THE FOURTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY.

THE GOSPEL. St. Luke vi. 36.

36 *Be ye therefore merciful, as your Father also is merciful.*

be the pattern for your affection and behaviour toward all men, even your enemies.

37 *Judge not, and ye shall not be judged: condemn not, and ye shall not be condemned: forgive, and ye shall be forgiven:*

38 *Give, and it shall be given unto you; good measure, pressed down, and shaken together, and running over, shall men give into your bosom. For with the same measure that ye mete withal it shall be measured to you again.*

39 *And he spake a parable unto them, Can the blind lead the blind? shall they not both fall into the ditch?*

the true light which I am guiding you with in these instructions.

40 *The disciple is not above his master: but every one that is perfect shall be as his master.*

41 *And why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother's eye, but perceivest not the beam that is in thine own eye?*

42 *Either how canst thou say to thy brother, Brother, let me pull out the mote that is in thine eye, when thou thyself beholdest not the beam that is in thine own eye? Thou hypocrite, cast out first the beam out of thine own eye, and then shalt thou see clearly to pull out the mote that is in thy brother's eye.*

the same or greater reproach, and hath not taken care to amend himself.

36. Let the universal goodness of Almighty God

37, 38. Beware of unnecessary and uncharitable censures, for God will order matters so, that your tenderness and your severity in these respects shall be paid back to you, each in its kind.

39. Be not seduced by the Pharisees and their false corrupt traditions, but follow

40. And if any one of them seem harsh, remember that I your Master have submitted to them before you.

41, 42. Then with regard to the cautions I gave you against censoriousness in particular; consider how absurd it is to be severe upon the failings of others, in them who have much greater of their own. Certainly no man is fit to reprehend his brother, who all the while stands liable to

COMMENT.

WHAT SORT and degree of mercy is here required of us, the * verses next before, and the parallel passage in St. Matthew, sufficiently explain.

It is such as does not restrain our affection and good offices to persons from whom we either have received or reasonably expect the like. Such as forgives our very enemies, forgives so as to love them, loves so as to do them good liberally and cheerfully. Such as conforms our practice to the example of that Father in heaven, who grudges not the daily returns of sun and rain, the blessings and conveniences of life, to them who daily provoke him to anger, and forfeit all pretension to any of those numberless benefits which yet are perpetually flowing down upon them from this fountain of all goodness. Such, in a word, as may carry this virtue as high as it can possibly go, and render us in that regard *perfect, as our heavenly Father is perfect.*

Such is the deportment Christianity expects, even where offences and injuries are manifest and flagrant. Much more does it oblige us not to aggravate or resent the actions of others by unjust jealousies and hard misconstructions; the tendency whereof to render all conversation uneasy, and to destroy peace and charity and mutual good understanding, is so natural, as abundantly to illustrate the connexion between the command at the 36th, and the prohibition immediately following at the 37th verse: for what can be of greater importance to promote love and mercy than the reducing our judgments of men and their actions to true and proper measures? Upon these depend the good or ill impressions we receive of our brethren. Those impressions influence, and indeed have the commanding stroke in forming, our whole deportment; and therefore it may be proper to observe the very particular care taken by the Christian religion to correct this vice of censuring and judging, than which (as lamentable experience too plainly demonstrates) there is scarce any one more mischievous, and yet more common and predominant, in the whole world.

To this purpose we are sometimes urged with the boldness and injustice of it, as usurping an authority which no way belongs to us. *Speak not evil one of another* (says St. James). *He that speaketh evil of his brother, and judgeth his brother, speaketh evil of the law, and judgeth the law: but if thou judge the law, thou art not a doer of the law, but a judge. There is one lawgiver, who is able to save and to destroy: who art thou that judgest another?* Such a man, in the apostle's sense, sets himself up above that rule which it is his duty to be governed by. He invades a character which God hath reserved as his own-peculiar; for as he alone hath authority to prescribe and impose our duty, so he alone hath power to pass sentence and inflict punishment upon our violation of it.

Sometimes again we find it represented as an encroachment not to be endured upon the independent freedom of our brethren. Thus St. Paul, upon mention of the hard censures men are apt to pass upon difference of judgment or practice, with regard to things in their own nature indifferent, expostulates with those of a contrary principle, by asking, *Why is my liberty judged of another man's conscience?* And elsewhere: *Every one of us shall give account of himself to God. Let us not therefore judge one another any more.* Which passages do likewise seem to insinuate the rashness and injury of deciding a cause, of which

¹ Matt. v. 48.

² James iv. 11, 12.

³ 1 Cor. x. 29.

⁴ Rom. xiv. 12, 13.

sufficient matter does not appear in evidence, and consequently such as we cannot possibly arrive at a perfect knowledge in.

At other times the arguments made use of for deterring us are the many mischievous consequences of this practice. To the party censured, as it lessens and takes from him in the esteem, not of ourselves only, but of as many more as our opinions or reflections find any credit with. To the community, as it disturbs the quiet and comfort of society, sows the seeds of hatred and contention, of envy and revenge, propagates ill thoughts and slanderous reports, and commits insufferable, and oftentimes irreparable, outrages upon the reputation of innocent persons. Hence we are told, that *"a whisperer separateth chief friends; that the mouth that slandereth slayeth the soul; that the words of such men are as wounds, and go down into the innermost parts of the belly; and that he who scatters them, and says, I am in sport, is as a madman, who casteth firebrands, arrows, and death."*

But if the reverence due to Almighty God will not restrain us from assuming his right of judicature; if the consideration of common equity will not keep us modest in matters that do not lie before us, and cannot by our most accurate observation be competently known; if the evils that follow this wicked disposition and practice cannot move us to compassion for the poor sufferers, or tenderness to mankind in general; yet behold here one argument which should at least, and one would hope could not fail of withholding us, and that is interest, and the dear love of ourselves; the delivering our own actions from being rigorously proceeded upon, and by our candour and good nature to other people engaging a return, and as it were laying in beforehand a stock, of favour for ourselves, when we, as all men sometimes do, miscarry. This is the consideration pressed by our blessed Lord, *"Judge not, and ye shall not be judged: condemn not, and ye shall not be condemned: forgive, and ye shall be forgiven."* Intimating, that as they who shew mercy shall be sure to find it, so they who show none shall have justice without mercy. And thus the proverb mentioned in the next verse shall be verified in both senses, as well on the disadvantageous and severe, as on the kind and beneficial part: *for with the same measure men mete withal, it shall be measured to them again.*

Now by not *judging* and *condemning* (as I had occasion formerly to take noticeⁿ) is plainly meant an instance of that mercy recommended just before in general terms, as a necessary imitation of our heavenly Father's goodness. Consequently, this cannot possibly extend to forbid all trying and sentencing of criminals by a legal and public authority. For these judicatures upon earth are an image of his great tribunal above; the persons sitting upon them are styled *gods* for that reason: and as he in heaven is a just judge, without any derogation from his mercy, so his vicegerents here below, both sacred and civil, inflict censures and punishments without any breach of that gentleness and love which the Christian religion requires. The Scriptures accordingly furnish frequent examples of, and stated rules for, such men in their behaviour and proceedings; proceedings which, in

* Prov. xvi. 28. xviii. 8. † Prov. xxvi. 18, 19; Wisdom i. 11. ‡ Luke vi. 37. ⁿ Vol. i. p. 55.

the very design of them, are acts of mercy, by giving a check to exorbitant wickedness and wrong. So that the judgment and condemnation here must be confined to that which private persons take upon them to exercise without any right or call; such as tends to disturb the peace of mankind, and destroys that charitable temper necessary for the support of it. Whereas the public and authoritative judging conduces to the preservation and advancement of both, and is a defence and charity to the innocent, though an instrument of severity to the guilty and obnoxious.

Again. Neither is it absolutely and upon all occasions unlawful, even for private persons to *judge* and *condemn* the principles or practices of their brethren. Had it been so, our Lord would not have left us (as he hath done in this very chapter, and other places of Scripture) rules to distinguish and to judge them by. For when thus taught to pronounce of the tree by its fruits, if those shall be found manifestly corrupt, we are equally forbidden to call evil good as to call good evil. But in this case too, great integrity and great tenderness is to be used. We are not to condemn without strong and clear evidence. We are not to do it officiously; we are not to do it despitely, not out of a design to render men odious, and their character despicable, rather than to serve any good purpose. We may discern the faults and failings of others, in order to beware of and avoid them ourselves. We may discover them to our acquaintance and friends, in order to prevent their being seduced by the ill example. We may lay them open to, and expostulate the matter with, the offenders themselves, in prospect of their admonition and amendment. But we are not allowed this to gratify a busy and meddling curiosity, to furnish discourse for every impertinent visit, to destroy their reputations wantonly and unprofitably, or to triumph over their weaknesses. So that the *judging* before us is such as proceeds from rashness and rigour and pride and partiality. And the *condemning* is that which is the effect of envy and ill-nature, of a malicious, uncharitable, and altogether unchristian disposition.

The *forgiving* here, as it signifies passing by injuries, together with the argument enforcing it, will have its proper place of being considered hereafter p. At present I shall speak to it under a more restrained sense, which seems to come closer up to the matter last in hand, and is more immediately and directly opposed to the *judging* and *condemning*, as now interpreted. By this then I would choose to understand a readiness to absolve men from the scandal or suspicion of guilt imputed to them, when probable circumstances concur fairly to clear them of it. Not retaining a jealousy or disadvantageous opinion which hath been once entertained, in despite of proper vindications and proofs to the contrary, but manifesting the same readiness, and a much greater satisfaction, in believing and asserting the innocence of our brethren, than ever we had done to call it into question. In short, our prejudices should be let go again, at least as easily as they were taken up; and all fair allowances should constantly be made, that the man and his case can possibly admit. And this must be done, even

in those actions whereby we think ourselves aggrieved and injured, and to those very persons who have already given us reason to look upon them as our enemies.

The judgment and condemnation which is promised here we shall escape, by this tenderness and candour, may be either that of men or that of Almighty God.

For that of men, first, they who put themselves forward and are severe in censuring their neighbours, take the most effectual course of preparing a scourge for their own backs; and in a very literal sense procure and lay up for themselves *a good measure, pressed down, and shaken together, and running over*. For the world is seldom behindhand in such retaliations. Scandal then is esteemed self-defence, and a just revenge, which takes effectual care that the aggressor shall have his own severity paid back again, not only in full tale, but with exorbitant interest. On the other hand, the man of discretion and reserve and good nature, that asperses nobody, nor intermeddles with matters that concern him not, that puts the best construction upon every thing, and allows all people their due commendation, is much more safe from the lash of ill tongues, and bespeaks the justice and favourable treatment of all that know him. So exceedingly malicious indeed is the world, that even this man must not flatter himself with the privilege of standing quite clear of censure and misrepresentation. But he hath this advantage, that when obloquy and detraction attempt upon his honour, the slander is scattered with less bitterness, received with less delight, and suffered with less regret and self-reproach, than it must needs be, where a man's own conscience tells him that he hath given others just provocation to make reprisals upon his good name, and by his own hard dealing hath deserved to be thought and used as a common enemy.

2. But then, secondly and especially, here is the judgment and condemnation of God to be regarded. It is true, in this respect, men may depend upon it that they shall not upon all accounts be dealt with so ill as they are wont to give themselves a liberty of dealing with one another. For *his judgment*, we are assured, will be *according to truth*; and so without any mixture, either of that involuntary error, or that deliberate falsehood which men too generally make no scruple to be guilty of in their representations and invidious characters.

But herein consists the advantage of the charitable man, that God will judge him according to his disposition, and overlook and be as kind to his failings as he hath been sparing of and tender to those of his brethren. Whereas to the rigid and censorious and bitter, he will mete their own measure exactly, and go to the extremity of justice. And surely this is discouragement and terror enough in all conscience, to reflect that, by giving a loose to a licentiousness of thought and tongue, we must expect to find no more kindness from God than men have found from us. For if God *enter into judgment with his servants, no man living can be justified in his sight*: and if he will *be extreme to mark what is done amiss*, where is the man able to abide it?

Least of all are those men qualified to abide it, whose critical observation and inhuman exposing of other people is here insinuated by our Lord himself to be an effect and mark of their hypocrisy; and the zeal to pull out *the mote in their brother's eye*, from want of being sensible that *a beam is in their own*. Whereby is likewise intimated, that men who themselves are grievous sinners are by no means proper persons to reprove and put to shame those who at worst are but their own resemblance: and that the true way to mend mankind is for each man to look at home, and begin with mending one. How much better were it to employ ourselves in publishing the praises of God, and vindicating the innocence of our abused brethren, in setting every action in its most advantageous light, and pouring balm into the many bleeding reputations which have been wounded deep by artificial malice and words, which though *smoother than oil* are yet in effect *very swords*! So should we promote peace and goodness and charity in this world: so should we likewise ensure to ourselves favour at that great and terrible day, when *by our words we shall be justified, and by our words we shall be condemned*²; that day, in which even the secrets of all hearts shall be brought into judgment, every hard uncharitable thought placed to account, and in which therefore it is of the last concern most earnestly to endeavour and to pray that our good Lord may deliver us.

THE FIFTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY.

THE COLLECT.

GRANT, O Lord, we beseech thee, that the course of this world may be so peaceably ordered by thy governance, that thy Church may joyfully serve thee in all godly quietness; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

THE EPISTLE. 1 St. Peter iii. 8.

8 *Be ye all of one mind, having compassion one of another, love as brethren, be pitiful, be courteous:* 8. Let concord in judgment and affection, tender concern for each other's sufferings, brotherly kindness, relenting and fellow-feeling, expressed by all proper acts of mercy and engaging behaviour toward each other, be visible among all Christians.

9 *Not rendering evil for evil, or railing for railing: but contrariwise blessing; knowing that ye are thereunto called, that ye should inherit a blessing.* 9. And let not the cruelty of your enemies provoke you to return the like injuries either in deed or word; but consider the precepts and design of your religion, both tending to this, that men should forgive as they are forgiven.

¹ Psalm lv. 21.

² Matt. xii. 37.

10 *For he that will love life, and see good days, let him refrain his tongue from evil, and his lips that they speak no guile:*

11 *Let him eschew evil, and do good; let him seek peace, and ensue it.*

12 *For the eyes of the Lord are over the righteous, and his ears are open unto their prayers: but the face of the Lord is against them that do evil.*

13 *And who is he that will harm you, if ye be followers of that which is good?*

14 *But and if ye suffer for righteousness' sake, happy are ye: and be not afraid of their terror, neither be troubled;*

15 *But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts.*

let not any fears of this kind shake your resolution, but continue by doing your duty to bring glory to God and his truth.

10, 11, 12, 13. Besides, such meekness is the best expedient to secure your peace and quiet with men, as well as protection and favour with God;

14, 15. Who, if he should permit you to be persecuted, yet, when it is for a good cause, even this is for your advantage. And therefore

COMMENT.

THE greatest part of the duties to which this portion of Scripture exhorts have fallen under some consideration upon other occasions before. The apostle had, in the close of the second and beginning of this chapter, inculcated such as Christians are obliged to by virtue of some particular relations and capacities wherein the providence of God hath placed them. * After which he proceeds here to some of a more general nature, whose obligation is of extent equal with this religion itself, and such as all who profess it have a concern in. But, though no person be exempted from, no time improper for, the exercise of them, yet are they more especially seasonable in persecution and affliction. Unanimity in principles, mutual forbearances, tender affection, fellow-feeling of hardships that bear close upon our brethren, and all the comforts and encouragements of a kind and condescending deportment, as they are indications of a temper most truly resembling the meek and holy Jesus, so are they the best defence against a common enemy, and of mighty efficacy to soften and keep up the hearts of each other under the calamities which a whole set of men shall be exposed to, by being all embarked in the same good cause. Assistances which nothing can so well prove the power of as experience; and such as they who want the wisdom mutually to contribute, do manifestly take the adversary's part, and betray their own safety, or lose their consolation. They break that force which united might make head against their danger, and add to that burden whose weight would be abated if each were ready to bear a part in it, by esteeming the sufferings of others his own, and acting in concert against them accordingly.

But even when thus joined and disposed to all the charitable offices which the same profession and the same distress ought to produce in

persons so nearly and so many ways allied, they are not at liberty to enter into all sorts of measures; they are presumed to suffer wrongfully, and to be blackened with malicious calumnies which are designed to give countenance to the injuries they sustain, by representing them as persons that deserve to suffer. But wrong must not be repaid with wrong, nor falsehood with falsehood, nor yet true reproaches with the like. This were to contradict the end and temper of their religion; nay, it were to go counter to interest no less than duty; for however flesh and blood and irritated passions may persuade the contrary, ill usage is more easily prevented, more likely to be escaped from, or, if neither of these should happen, yet more eligible to be endured with meekness and innocence, than by giving way to those hot and angry resentments which the false wisdom of the world is wont to have recourse to for remedies against them.

1. ^c These contradict the temper and end of the Christian religion, which propounds the inheritance of a blessing as its reward; a blessing freely bestowed upon enemies and offenders, and so provoking us to an imitation of that mercy and forgiveness in God, upon the exercise of which the whole of our happiness depends. A blessing never to be obtained by any who will not submit to this condition. A blessing merited by the sufferings of a Saviour in our stead and behalf, who hath in ^d this particular left us a pattern of not reviling again when reviled, nor threatening when we suffer.

2. This contradicts our interest too. It gives up that gentleness and goodness which will not fail to melt the hearts that have any remains of humanity, and disarm that rage which returns of fierceness would exasperate ^e. It robs us of our best defence, the peculiar favour and protection of God, and takes the cause out of his hand, when we attempt our own deliverance by methods displeasing to him ^f. (Concerning both which arguments I beg my reader's leave to refer him back to my comment on the Epistle for the third Sunday after Epiphany.) And it obstructs the supports of a good conscience, the inward consolations of the blessed Spirit, and the cheering prospect of a recompense hereafter, which belong to them only *who suffer for righteousness' sake* ^g.

That then which Christians, when persecuted and injured, have to do, is not to let any of those despondencies overwhelm their spirits which their oppressors are labouring to drive them to, and which they who have none but human helps to depend upon find it impossible to bear up against. They must *sanctify the Lord God in their hearts*; that is, testify their belief of his glorious attributes to all the world. And this is done, when they depend upon his power to extricate them out of otherwise invincible difficulties, and so flee to and rest upon him as a sure sanctuary. When they refer to his wisdom and justice the season and methods of executing vengeance upon those wicked men, who *smite down his people, and trouble his faithful ones*. When, notwithstanding any delays in the accomplishment, they buoy up their sinking spirits with the certainty of his promises: and lastly, be the

^c Ver. 9.^d See Gospel for the fifth Sunday in Lent.^e Ver. 10, 11.^f Ver. 12.^g Ver. 14.

event of things at present what it will, when they steadfastly adhere to their duty at the expense of all the world counts dear, and will not be prevailed upon for any terms to incur his displeasure. Men of this disposition do him true honour, and as they may reasonably hope that ^h his eyes will be always over them, and his ears open to their prayers; so are they in the true frame of mind for offering up the prayer of this day in particular; even that the course of this world may be so peaceably ordered by his governance, that his church may joyfully serve him in all godly quietness, through Jesus Christ our Lord.

THE FIFTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY.

THE GOSPEL. St. Luke v. 1.

- 1 *And it came to pass, that, as the people pressed upon him to hear the word of God, he stood by the lake of Genesareth,* 1. Compare this with St. Matth. iv. 18—22.
- 2 *And saw two ships * standing by the lake: but the fishermen were gone out of them, and were washing their nets.* 2. * Two vessels, tho one belonging to Andrew and Peter; the other to Zebedee and his two sons, James and John.
- 3 *And he entered into one of the ships, which was Simon's, and prayed him that he would thrust out a little from the land. And he sat down, and taught the people out of the ship.*
- 4 *Now when he had left speaking, he said unto Simon, Launch out into the deep, and let down your nets for a draught.*
- 5 *And Simon answering said unto him, Master, we have toiled all the night, and have taken nothing: nevertheless at thy word I will let down the net.*
- 6 *And when they † had thus done, they inclosed a great multitude of fishes: and their net brake.* 6. † Andrew and Peter.
- 7 *And they beckoned unto their partners ‡, which were in the other ship, that they should come and help them. And they came, and filled both the ships, so that they began to sink.* 7. ‡ Zebedee (who was likewise present. See Matth. iv. 21.) and his two sons.
- 8 *When Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, Depart from me; for I am a sinful man, O Lord.*
- 9 *For he was astonished, and all that were with him, at the draught of the fishes which they had taken:*

10 *And so was also James, and John, the sons of Zebedee, which were partners with Simon. And Jesus said unto Simon, Fear not; from henceforth thou shalt catch men.*

it highly probable that James and John had their part and concern in it also.

11 *And when they had brought their ships to land, they forsook all, and followed him.*

10. What St. Luke relates here as spoken to Simon, St. Matthew is express was equally spoken to Andrew. And the next verse makes

COMMENT.

THE Gospel for this day (as will more fully appear by and by) relates the manner of calling four great apostles, who were main pillars of the Christian church. For the better understanding whereof, I shall first compare this with some other scriptures wherein they are concerned, and then make some remarks proper to the occasion.

Now first, there cannot, I think, be any doubt, whether the coming of two of these disciples to Christ, mentioned in the ^a beginning of St. John's Gospel, were not altogether distinct from this related here. There, two of John's disciples are moved to follow Jesus by their master declaring him to be the *Lamb of God*; here, Jesus makes the first approach, and takes them off from the business of their trade, when their thoughts and labours were employed another way. There, Andrew finds his brother Simon, and conducts him to Christ; here, Jesus finds both together and calls both to himself. ^b The baptist there is said expressly to have disciples retaining to him, and after that to have baptized publicly; but at this time John was cast into prison, and from thence Jesus took the occasion of retreating into Galilee. It was here he entered on his prophetic office, preached in his own city Nazareth, and exerted his divine power in sundry instances, before this miraculous draught of fishes. Hence it is plain these apostles had two different calls, directed to two different purposes; and consequently the followings of Jesus in obedience to them were of different sorts. The first only brought them to the personal knowledge of Christ; the second to a personal attendance upon him. After the first they returned to the business of their trade, and lived by their own labour; after the second they desisted from secular business, became a part of their Master's family and retinue, conversed constantly with him, and were sustained by him.

2. Let us, in the next place, compare this description of that call by St. Luke with that other more concise one by St. Matthew and St. Mark. They tell us these fishermen *were casting a net into the sea*; this evangelist, that they were *gone out of their ships, and were washing* (or, as it might more properly be rendered, *had washed*) *their nets* ^c. They say, that Jesus, upon calling Peter and Andrew, departed thence, and finding James and John with Zebedee their father, called them also: but here all four are said to have been together, all to have as-

^a Ch. i. 37—43. ^b John iii. 23, 24, &c.; Matt. iv. 12; Mark i. 14; Luke iii. 19, 20. Matt. iv.; Mark i.; Luke iv.; John ii. iv. ^c Matt. iv. 18; Mark i. 16; Luke v. 2. Matt. iv. 21; Mark i. 19, 20.

sisted in drawing up the vast quantity of fishes; and all, as was hinted before, are intimated to have a concern in those words at the tenth verse, though more particularly directed to Simon.

Now for reconciling any seeming differences between passages of this nature some allowances are reasonable and necessary to be made for variation of circumstances, between an historian who makes it his business to recount matters distinctly and at large, and another, whose intention it is only to declare facts in general, without entering into the series and order of each action. This is the case of the two other evangelists; they designed us no more than a summary account of these four apostles' call, and their compliance with it. Hence they contented themselves with setting down apart so much first as relates to Andrew and Peter, and afterwards what related to James and John. But now St. Luke, who purposes to show the manner and whole process of this call, records the miracle at length, interweaves several remarkable passages wherein the four were jointly concerned, and by which they at once received such astonishing and convincing evidences of Christ's power, as disposed them to that eminent readiness and zeal of devoting themselves to his service ever after.

Thus then the order of the whole seems to lie:—Our Saviour had for privacy retired to the side of the sea or lake of Gennesaret. It so fell out, that some fishermen just at that time had been long toiling without any success: they had therefore now left off, had washed their nets, and some of the company had not only washed, but were mending them. In order whereunto they had quitted their boats, but were now returned to them again. All these circumstances, though not needful to be mentioned in the brief account of St. Matthew and St. Mark, did yet contribute greatly to St. Luke's purpose of undertaking to describe the miraculous draught taken at our Lord's command for making a fresh experiment. He therefore fitly brings them all together, because such as argued the parties concerned to have desisted from any further attempts, and to sit down in despair of any game at that time. Consequently the prodigious success they found so quickly after was the more amazing, and the more lively represented, by the many fruitless trials and utter distrust of any such thing which thus appear to have gone before.

While our Lord was walking upon the strand, and observing these fishers, the multitudes pursued him, and for curiosity, or more probably for edification, desired to hear the word of God at his mouth. He, who was always willing to gratify any inclinations to piety and improvement in heavenly wisdom, contrived to instruct them in a manner the most commodious that the condition of the place would allow. Hence he entered into Simon's ship, which was now at full leisure to receive him, and so placed the multitudes before him as at once to deliver himself from the crowd, and to gain an advantage, by that small eminence, of being better heard. Thus far, and in this method, the three evangelists are brought to a good agreement, and so leave us no sufficient ground of doubting whether the action be not one and the same, though not described by all with the same exactness and particularity. For here St. Luke sets forward with the miracle

omitted by them^d, the importance whereof will be more clearly manifested by those remarks which I proposed, in the

II. Second place, to make upon this occasion.

1. And here the first thing I choose to observe is the ready obedience of St. Peter, when Jesus bade him *launch out into the deep, and let down the nets for a draught*. His answer immediately is, *Master, we have toiled all the night, and have taken nothing: nevertheless at thy word I will let down the net^e*. How vigorous were the impressions of those divine discourses which produced a cheerful compliance, not discouraged by the weariness of a whole night's labour in vain! The nets were washed, and reserved for a more favourable season, and yet the trouble is willingly renewed at our Lord's instance. A seasonable warning for every servant of his not to despond upon any unsuccessful trials in his Master's business, nor to sink his spirits for any disappointments in the way of his ordinary calling; when we see such an example now before us of such a blessing upon a mind ready to labour at his word, and so large amends made at once for so many fruitless experiments before.

2. For that is my second observation—the wonderful success of this obedience; *When they had thus done, they inclosed a great multitude of fishes^f*. So great that *their net brake*, and they found themselves obliged to call in the assistance of their partners from another ship; and both the vessels were so deeply laden *that they began to sink*. A draught which nothing at that time could give them reason to expect: which nothing could have caused, but the commanding power of Him who hath all creatures at his own disposal, and calls them together at such seasons and places as he sees fit: a draught which nothing could merit, nothing could better resemble than the marvellous zeal and faith of these fishers, their worthy and reverent apprehensions of Christ, and the strong persuasion they entertained, that notwithstanding any former disappointments, not any thing which they had his express order to do, though in itself most unlikely to prosper, should ever be done without attaining its designed effect. A most significant emblem this of the indefatigable industry and most amazing successes of these apostles afterwards when they became *fishers of men*.

3. A third observation that offers itself is, the modest and becoming expression of humble wonder, by *Peter's falling down at Jesus' knees*, and crying out, *Depart from me; for I am a sinful man, O Lord^g*. Which adoration and form of speech conspire to denote the profoundest reverence imaginable; an awful acknowledgment of a Divine person and power, a mixture of humility and surprise and dread: looking up first to the Almighty Author of it, and then reflecting back upon himself as altogether unworthy so sensible a demonstration of the Divine favour: all which behaviour seems to have proceeded from a notion so often inculcated by Moses, that *no flesh can see God and live*. This taught men to believe his presence too bright and strong for human nature to sustain, and from thence led them to conclude, that all his extraordinary approaches and appearances toward them might be ominous and full of danger. And is not this a very natural

^d Ver. 4.

^e Ver. 5.

^f Ver. 6, 7.

^g Ver. 8.

inference, when men remember how much they have to provoke the anger of God, and how little, how impossible indeed it is that they should have any thing at all to engage his kindness, or invite him to the condescension of a friendly correspondence with them ?

4. Another remark proper for this occasion is, the end and event of all that went before. For the method taken by our Lord to compose St. Peter's astonishment we have in these words, *Fear not ; from henceforth thou shalt catch men*^b. Thus he is given plainly to understand whither this miracle led, and what it portended. That it was the figure of a richer and more plentiful prey : that he should be taken from that mean employment, and exalted to one of higher and more honourable importance : that his net should enclose the minds of reasonable creatures, and bring them into captivity to the gospel ; that these should be caught, not as the other silly animals, to their destruction, but *taken*ⁱ alive, nay, therefore taken that they may live. O blessed capture, which is the only instrument, the indispensable condition, of our happiness ! To escape this spiritual net is only to be *free from righteousness*^k ; a false imaginary freedom, worse than the worst of slavery. It is to continue servants of sin, in bondage to lust and corruption^l ; a service which entitles to no other wages but death, vengeance and wrath without mercy, horrors and torments of body and soul, irreversible, unconceivable, everlasting.

There is indeed one of the most material remarks proper to this matter yet behind. The compliance, I mean, paid to our Lord's^m command of following and forsaking all they had for him. But in regard our Church hath not only fixed upon that as the particular commendation of one of these apostlesⁿ, but hath taught us to pray, that we may imitate the pattern set us here ; I purposely reserve for the day dedicated to his memory to consider, both wherein the virtue of this obedience consisted, and how far we and Christians in general are concerned to follow examples of this nature.

THE SIXTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY.

THE COLLECT.

O GOD, who hast prepared for them that love thee such good things as pass man's understanding^a ; Pour into our hearts such love toward thee, that we, loving thee above all things, may obtain thy promises, which exceed all that we can desire ; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

^a Ver. 10.
^m Luke v. 11.

ⁱ *ἡ ἐκ γάρρην.*

^b See St. Andrew's day.

^k Rom. vi. 20.

^l *Ibid.* ver. 23.

ⁿ 1 Cor. ii. 9.

THE EPISTLE. Romans vi. 3.

3 *Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death?*

4 *Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.*

body was covered with earth. The effect whereof will be a rising again to a new life, as he rose from death and the grave.

5 *For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection:*

resembled to him in the benefits of the latter.

6 *Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin.*

7 *For he that is dead is freed from sin.*

8 *Now if we be dead with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with him:* death we must live in a new manner, and resemble us to the life Christ now leads.

9 *Knowing that Christ being raised from the dead dieth no more; death hath no more dominion over him.*

10 *For in that he died, he died unto sin once: but in that he liveth, he liveth unto God.*

11 *Likewise reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord.*

3. Ye cannot sure but be sensible, that the sacrament of baptism obliges us to the belief of Christ's death.

4. Nay, not only the belief of it, but a conformity to it: intimated by that significant ceremony of covering the party with water, as his dead

body was covered with earth.

5. For if we be united to him in the resemblance of the former, we shall likewise be

resembled to him in the benefits of the latter.

6. In the former, by living no longer a life of sin, which he died on purpose to take away the guilt and dominion of.

7. All obligations of servitude naturally determining with our lives natural.

8. And accordingly from the instant of this figurative

9, 10, 11. Which is subject to no second death, and therefore we must not return to our former course, which, in the spiritual sense, would be to die a second time, and so to be unlike him who died once for all.

COMMENT.

The apostle had been magnifying the freedom of God's grace in the redemption of sinners by the death of Christ, and shewing that the works and deserts of men had no part in procuring this mighty benefit, but that it ought to be thankfully and entirely ascribed to the divine compassion and love. From hence, he was aware, some might be perverse enough to draw this wicked inference, that then the worse men are, the more they contribute to the illustrating God's mercy; and so the freedom of this grace takes off the necessity of a holy life^b.

This inference having first rejected with indignation and abhorrence, he proceeds here to prove it most unreasonable in itself, and altogether inconsistent with the profession and design of the Christian religion. And the first argument made use of to this purpose is taken from the sacrament of baptism, wherein we solemnly take that profession upon ourselves. This makes the subject of the Epistle now in hand: and the force of St. Paul's reasoning upon it may be discerned by considering the particulars that follow:

1. It is plain from this and several other places of Scriptura, that baptism implies and requires an express belief of the death of Christ, as the instrument of our salvation; and consequently a firm hope and trust of obtaining that salvation by his sufferings, as the efficient and meritorious cause, but by faith, and a conversation agreeable to it, as a conditional cause, without which the other will stand us in no stead. So that a right belief and a good life are our part of the covenant, which, like all other covenants, is mutual, and releases the other party contracting, if that which we indent for be not so discharged as God under the gospel hath been pleased to require.

2. The apostle urges, that this is what Christians cannot but be sensible of, because not only the terms upon which they are admitted into membership with the church, and all the present and future privileges consequent upon it, do expressly mention this condition, but also the rites of this sacrament sufficiently intimate it to them. The ceremony of immersing the body of the baptized represents the burial of a dead person under ground. The pouring water upon the party, in cases where the former cannot conveniently be done, answers to the covering and throwing earth upon a person so dead. But both agree in figuring a death and burial, as the emerging again doth a new life. And this, it is plain, can only mean the mortification of some old, and quickening of some contrary principle, in a spiritual sense. All this, though it pass upon, yet manifestly having no effect, nor working any change upon the outward man, or natural life; but only being contrived by a sensible representation, and some proper ceremonies seen by us to confirm our faith in effects which we neither do nor can see: which is the case of all the sacraments, properly so called, that are or ever have been, (and of some kind there ever have been sacraments,) in all ages of the world; that is, outward and visible signs of some inward and spiritual grace, suspended upon conditions suited to the state of religion at the time of their respective institution and observance.

3. Now thirdly, This I take to be observable in every institution of this kind, that there hath constantly been some significant expression both of the privilege and the duty of the parties entering into covenant by it. It were no difficult undertaking, I conceive, to make this out, as to the ages of the church antecedent to Christianity. But I confine myself to St. Paul's instance before us. The Christian's privilege is a release from the guilt and dominion of sin, and from the death inflicted as a punishment upon it. This release is procured by the death and resurrection of Christ, considered not in his private and personal capacity, but as the common ransom and representative of

mankind. This death is represented by the baptized being put under water, this resurrection by his being taken out of the water. The former expresses our belief in the benefits of his dying; the latter that of our rising again after his example, and that we are no longer liable to endless corruption. In this consists our privilege; we die as he died, but we are assured of restoration to life as and because he liveth again. But then the design of his death considered, as that which was to prevent future as well as to atone for past sins, and that this can be no otherwise effected but by reformation of life, as plainly shews our duty; only with this difference, that in the point of privilege we are literally conformed to the image of Christ, and as we actually die, so we shall actually rise from the dead; whereas in point of duty, we attain to a metaphorical resemblance only. Our body is not crucified and killed in baptism, but the body of sin, our corrupt appetites and lusts; our persons do not revive, but our graces and good principles; from whence it is that the apostle does not say we are planted together in his *death* and *resurrection*; but (as St. Chrysostom and other fathers observe) very emphatically interposes *the likeness of his death*, and *the likeness of his resurrection*. Thus intimating a resemblance of these things only at present, yet this such a resemblance as is necessary to bring us to the reality. In short (as hath been formerly hinted)^o what our Saviour did and suffered for us must be in a spiritual sense, and so far as we are capable, imitated and acted over again by us; and is not only an object of our faith, but a rule for our practice.

Now there are some passages in the scripture under consideration, which, if diligently attended to, may be of use toward discovering the true extent of our duty in this particular. I will endeavour as briefly as I can to make some profit of them to that purpose.

1. First then, let those expressions be observed, that *the old man is crucified with Christ*, that *the body of sin is to be destroyed*, and that *he that is dead is freed from sin*.

These phrases, *the old man*, and *the body of sin*, are of a collective signification, and import that in the covenant of baptism there is no manner of reserve allowed us, but that our obligations are universal, and every sort of corrupt lust, by the indulging whereof we are brought into disobedience, is equally renounced by them. The reasonableness of admitting no exceptions in this engagement my reader hath already been acquainted with in a late discourse P. That which we are as highly concerned to get a right understanding of is, how *this old man is crucified*, and that *body of sin destroyed*, so as to deserve the character of being dead itself, or our being dead with regard to it, and after the example of Christ, who, we know, was literally and in the strictest sense so.

Upon the like occasion I have formerly taken notice^q, that it is not human nature, considered with the appetites and affections essential to it, but in regard of the corruptions superinduced by sin, that we lift ourselves against, and are to treat as an enemy. Baptism, when

^o Epistle for Easter-eve.

^p Epistle for fifth Sunday after Easter.

^q Epistle for first Sunday after Easter.

making us Christians, leaves us still men, and consequently neither does itself, nor can possibly engage us to, eradicate those passions and desires which are interwoven with our original constitution. Nor indeed is there any need it should; for all our fault and mischief proceeds not from the affections themselves, but from the misapplication or excess (in a word, from the abuse) of them. Love and hatred are the same motions of the soul, whether God and heaven or sin and the world be the object. But these, according to the thing loved or hated, and the measure in which it is so, promote our virtue or ensnare us in vice. The meaning then of *dying* to sin is only that, by our care and good habits, so entire a mastery should be attained in the government of our affections, and the turning them to holiness become so easy and familiar and constant a practice with us, that this custom should be a kind of new nature, and those suggestions to evil, which even in the best men will now and then be stirring, should have no more power to seduce us than a dead carcass hath to move and act. For, properly speaking, the will is the vital part of the soul; and as the life or death natural appears by the body exerting itself in or being deprived of motion, so is the life or death spiritual to be judged by the determinations of the will. And be the temptations from without and the inclinations from within to do wickedly never so importunate and strong; yet if all these are not only dead but buried, so conquered and so perfectly kept down that they lie as it were under ground, cannot get up again, cannot shake or move the will to any degree of indulgence or consent; that soul is truly *dead with Christ*, that *old man* in it *crucified*, and the *body of sin destroyed*. Which indeed is the only *body* we are concerned to destroy. And hence the very form of our baptismal vow runs, that we *renounce*, not the *world* at large, but the *vain pomp and glory and covetous desires* of it: nor the *flesh* at large, whose desires to put off it is impossible, but the *carnal* and impure lusts of it. And therefore in our admirable Catechism the substance of that vow is repeated, with this small but significant variation—the *pomps and vanities of this wicked world*, and *all the sinful lusts of the flesh*. Thus intimating sufficiently that we engage no farther against these than as they are *wicked* and *sinful*; either such themselves, or the means and occasions of betraying us into habits and actions and dispositions that are so. And thus much, I conceive, may suffice for explaining that death to sin whereby we are said to be *dead and buried with Christ* in baptism.

2. But as the benefits of his real death are accomplished and assured to us by his real resurrection, so are those of our figurative one by our resembling him in the latter as well as the former. And to this purpose the apostle mentions being *alive with him, planted together in the likeness of his resurrection*, and, for an explication of his meaning, as *he was raised from the dead by the glory of his Father*, so our *burial with him by baptism into death* is with this design, that, *like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father*, *even so we also should walk in newness of life*. The state we are left in by the former particular is a state of inactivity, which supposes the corrupt principle killed in us. But the state denoted by

this is one of vigour and action, and supposes us quickened by a quite contrary principle. That would suffice to work in us the image of a Saviour dead, and always to continue so; but without this we cannot attain another as necessary part of his likeness—the image of a risen and living Saviour. For the character of a Christian is by no means answered in the *mortifying our evil and corrupt affections*, but, as our Service expresses it, must be finished by *daily proceeding in all virtue and godliness of living*.

This is the import of those figures so very frequent in Scripture, of a *new heart and a new spirit, a new man and a new creature, a new birth and a new life*. All which insinuate the greatness of the change; the greatest indeed that a soul is capable of, and so great, as to render the metaphors applied to it exceeding just and proper.

Now in regard the soul of man is a principle or subject of moral good and evil, the newness here spoken of, it is evident, must be a newness of notions, dispositions, desires, and of a conversation proceeding from and agreeable to these. Which, when heavenly and virtuous, are deservedly styled *new*, because corrective of, contrary to, and superinduced after, those vicious and worldly ones, wherewith in this corrupt state of nature every man is born. That change is made by the grace of God's holy Spirit, which gives a fresh turn to our thoughts and affections, imprints a true sense of good and evil, puts a quite different bent upon the will, disposes it to walk by faith rather than by sight, to prefer pure and intellectual before sensual and polluted pleasures, to overbalance present and mean with eternal, though future and invisible advantages; and so by these and many other like operations renders us new, that is, quite other men from what it found us, either actually being, or in a disposition to be.

And of this change the resurrection of our Lord is very elegantly proposed for a pattern. His body, when risen, as hath been generally conceived, was so far spiritualized, as no longer to be subject to any of our common decays and infirmities. And the eating and drinking we read of after this were instances of condescension to give incontestible evidence of his being alive again; not any necessary supports to a nature then wanting them. In like manner, when Christians love things that are holy and spiritual and heavenly, and get above the world and its temptations, they act in agreement to their profession. But for the cares and delights and profits, these indeed are part of their animal life. These should always be looked upon as necessary encumbrances, and inseparable from a condition of mortality; but such as never can be worthy the chief of their thought and pains, not to be wished farther than nature and the conveniences of doing good require them; and therefore the time and labour employed about them is rather to be submitted to than chosen.

3. Once more. The resemblance of Christ, to which baptism brings us, implies a constant perseverance in our duty. Thus St. Paul argues too: *Christ being raised from the dead dieth no more; death hath no more dominion over him. For in that he died, he died unto sin once: but in that he liveth, he liveth unto God*. And then follows, *Likewise reckon*

ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord. The inference is strong, and the parallel close. Our Lord could die but once, because there could never be occasion to require it a second time. For the design of his death was to take away sin; and because this was accomplished to the uttermost at once, therefore he died once for all. This argued the perfection of his sacrifice: this argues too the life to which he rose to be endless. Now, if baptism represent his resurrection as well as his death, it must be such a *rising to a life of righteousness* as never dies to sin any more. Accordingly, herein the spiritual and natural life agree, that as we can be born but once, so we are baptized but once. And as the vital principle in each case is then imparted for a man's whole term, so is it in each case left to the man's own care to preserve and cherish it. There may indeed be many languishings and indispositions; there may also be violent and acute diseases in the body, from which recovery is had, and health perfectly restored. There may too in the soul be great slackenings of zeal, wastings and failings, falls by infirmity or surprise, nay, grievous deliberate offences, and corrupt customs. And yet these, if taken in time, may be cured by the spiritual food and physic provided for that purpose. Consideration and prayer, and repentance, the word of God, and the sacrament of his death, these are our refreshments and our remedies. They sustain us when we droop, they restore us when we are sick, they enable us to grow, and strengthen us when at our stature. And therefore it is as much as the life I am speaking of is worth, for every man to apply these frequently, seasonably, and reverently. For by neglecting these ordinances ill habits get ground, and a redundance of noxious humours will choke our vital principle, and throw us back again into that death from which there is no birth or resurrection to rescue us.

O that the generality of Christians would seriously lay this scripture to heart, that they would now and then reflect upon the engagements and the end of baptism! that they would carefully examine what conformity is to be found between themselves and the dead and risen Saviour! and be convinced that they have no foundation for hope in, nor benefit from, that death and resurrection, farther than such conformity can justify their title! Men would not then content themselves with such a lame obedience, as covers and quite swallows up a few faint essays towards, or acts of, piety and virtue, with frequent and grievous relapses into sin: as if the Lord, whom they are bound to imitate, had died often, and lain long buried, but rose and lived for very short intervals. They would not think it sufficient to lead a life of ease and idleness, of no use, no example; as if the doing good were of no consequence, but the abstaining from notorious evil were the whole of their engagement: which indeed is in some degree to copy after a dead, but by no means after a risen and living Saviour. Much less could any, who attend to this passage, allow themselves in such habits as are a scandal to religion, and a virtual abjuration of their baptismal covenant. Adultery and lewdness, gluttony and drunkenness, covetousness and ambition, strife and revenge, profaneness and irreligion; these are such raging plagues as assault the very

seat of our spiritual life. The persons guilty of them could not do a kinder thing to the credit of Christianity than openly to renounce it; I had almost said, nor a kinder thing to themselves; since they only profess it to their heavier condemnation; since they neither imitate their Lord nor any servant of his, except that traitorous one who said, *Master, Master, and kissed him*, as a signal to those enemies who came under his conduct to take and to mock and to kill him.

THE SIXTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY.

THE GOSPEL. St. Matt. v. 20.

20 *Jesus said unto his disciples, Except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven.*

21 *Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not kill; and whosoever shall kill shall be in danger of the judgment:*

22 *But I say unto you, That whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment: and whosoever shall say to his brother, Raca, shall be in danger of the council: but whosoever shall say, Thou fool, shall be in danger of hell fire.*

23 *Therefore if thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath ought against thee;*

24 *Leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift.* for such a one to make atonement for his own sins, is to be reconciled to his brother, to make satisfaction for any wrong done by him, and then to come and make his application to God for that forgiveness, which, till this be done, he is in no condition of obtaining.

25 *Agree with thine adversary quickly, whiles thou art in the way with him; lest at any time the adversary deliver thee to the judge, and the judge deliver thee to the officer, and thou be cast into prison.*

26 *Verily I say unto thee, Thou shalt by no means come out thence, till thou hast paid the uttermost farthing.*

be your practice with Almighty God, and take up the quarrel with him by returning to charity before it be too late, and the case past all remedy.

20. I tell you, that the righteousness I require from my disciples is much more perfect than that which the Jewish masters teach that men are by the law obliged to.

21. They, for the purpose, hold the sixth commandment to be satisfied by abstaining from the act of murder.

22. But I tell you, that rash and causeless anger, and all reproachful language, proceeding from a spirit of rancour and revenge, is a violation of this commandment;

23, 24. And this so great a one, and so offensive to God, that he will not accept the prayers of an uncharitable man. And the only way

for such a one to make atonement for his own sins, is to be reconciled to his brother, to make satisfaction for any wrong done by him, and then to come and make his application to God for that forgiveness, which, till this be done, he is in no condition of obtaining.

25, 26. When men are sensible that an adversary hath them at advantage, they lose no time in making up the matter, that so the ill consequences of letting suits run to the extremity may be prevented. Let this

COMMENT.

Our Lord had a little before obviated all imputations of novelty that might be cast upon his doctrines, by declaring it his design, not to *destroy*, but to *fulfil*, or bring up the moral law to its just height and perfection. * And here he proceeds to set down one out of many instances, wherein the Christian religion hath exalted our duty above what the Jewish doctors held men accountable for. They condemned gross crimes, and palliated less; and were content with such an obedience as the letter of their law directed. He requires all those qualifications and good dispositions which secure and promote the true intent of the law. He cuts down wickedness at the very root, and prevents the act by suppressing the first irregular motions, and every tendency toward it. Of this we have here a remarkable example with regard to causeless anger and reviling language: which I design for the subject of this discourse. And to the intent it may have its due effect, I will, first, set before you the sin of anger, according to the several degrees of it mentioned here; secondly, I will represent the great guilt of it; and, thirdly, I will prescribe some remedies against it.

1. The fault, first, is described in different proportions, each whereof rises above and is an aggravation to that which went before. The lowest is expressed by a man's *being angry with his brother without a cause*. Concerning anger in general, and how far it is allowable, a proper occasion for inquiry will offer hereafter†. Let it suffice at present to observe, that the sin here condemned may be committed at least these three following ways:

1. First. All that anger is evidently causeless which men suffer themselves to fly out into without any at all, or upon very slight provocations. And this is frequently too visible in hot and hasty people, whose violent, unaccountable, absurd passion is really, at the same time, matter both of pity and wonder. While for mere trifles, for any thing, for nothing, for groundless suspicions, and jealous whimsies of their own, they work themselves up to all the extravagancies of rage and madness. When they are incensed against brute beasts, at creatures inanimate, at crosses purely accidental; in which there can be no foundation for anger, because these things do not act by will or choice, nor, even when they happen to be instruments of harm, are they in a capacity of intending us any injury. When we disorder ourselves because others do not agree with us in the same opinions, or speak or act just as we would have them. When we are ruffled with the reproofs of a teacher, or fret at the admonitions of a friend; and resent that as a slight or a wrong which was intended for our good, and done in duty or in kindness to us. In a word, when any of those things put us out of temper which a good man would think deserve his thanks, or a wise man would overlook as not worth his notice. In all these, and in sundry like instances, the man who feels himself provoked is in the strictest sense *angry without a cause*.

2. And so is he too, secondly, who, when a just cause of resentment

* Ver. 21, 22.

† See Epistle for nineteenth Sunday after Trinity.

is given, exceeds in the measure of it, and overishes a passion deeper and fiercer than the offence can justify. And this happens as oft as men are transported beyond the bounds of consideration to do or suffer that which, when they come to reflect upon in cold blood, and to weigh things in an equal balance, they find cause to check and condemn themselves for; for moderation and equity are virtues of perpetual force, and some standing rules of decency and duty no circumstances can make it allowable to transgress. In such transgressions therefore, though the whole of our anger may not be without cause, yet so much of it is as exceeds a reasonable proportion, and outweighs the nature and the merit of the crime. How much comes under the censure of being thus immoderate is utterly impossible for me or any man to determine in the general. This is one of the points in which every one must be his own casuist. But all that will certainly deserve to be so censured, which the judgment, when sober, and free from prepossession and heat, shall find to be more than was due or becoming. And we cannot doubt but this will oftentimes prove a very great deal, when it is considered how false those glasses are through which a mind distempered with passion sees every thing; how the least touch galls us when we are inflamed and sore; and after how different a manner we feel and entertain and judge of the same language and the same behaviour, when we come to be cool and quiet, and examine them over again with the principles of undisturbed reason and the meekness of the Christian religion.

3. Another instance of the crime before us I conceive may be insinuated by the word *brother*; the cherishing, I mean, malicious and revengeful thoughts against a person whom we are under the strictest engagements to serve and love. Forgetting the nearness of that relation which nature and religion have established betwixt us; as, that we are the workmanship of the same God, children of the same father, the same flesh and blood, animated with the same rational and immortal soul; and (which ought to be yet infinitely more endearing) that we are redeemed by the same Saviour, washed in the same baptism, united by the same faith, and so members of the same mystical body, and heirs, through hope, of the same everlasting kingdom.

Where these manifold ties of intimate and tender affection are remembered, they cannot but mightily dispose to gentleness and forbearance. And every wise and good man will be content to make large allowances in behalf of such a brother, and judge these affinities worthy to be put into the scales against many miscarriages. He will not take disgust where no occasion is given, and where a slight one happens he will make no difficulty to overlook it. He will put a check even upon his justest resentments, and stop within the bounds of equity and decency. Especially he will take so effectual care to curb and quiet the sallies of his passion, that whatever sudden ruffles may disorder him, none shall be suffered to take root, and fix into inveterate hatred and spite. For he who acts otherwise exceeds in the cause and the degree of his anger; and he who acts otherwise to a *brother*, exceeds in regard of the person to whose prejudice the indignation is conceived. Thus much seems implied in the first degree of the fault forbidden here, that of being *angry with a brother without*

a cause. So great depravity, it seems, have our passions of this kind, even when suppressed and kept to ourselves; even when men think they have good reason to commend their own temper and their conduct, for so far governing their behaviour and their tongues, that neither the one shall discover their resentment, nor the other break out into abusive language.

The two degrees that follow suppose this likely to be done. And because both *raca* and *fool* here are terms of virulence and contempt, and differ only in the greater or less degree of anger expressed by them; I shall not think myself obliged to speak to them distinctly, but will put them together, under the common topic of reproach, and vilifying speeches to one another.

But here I must promise that such terms of disdain are not universally unlawful. From the mouth of a superior they are often of use, sometimes of necessity, to awaken stupid men, to render them more effectually at once sensible and ashamed of their folly, to expose the horrible absurdity of pernicious opinions, or the flagrant enormity of wicked practices. Thus David and Solomon call the perverse sinner *fool* times without number. Thus St. James declares him who *rests upon faith without works* to be *raca*, or a *vain man*^a. Thus St. Paul asks who had bewitched his *foolish Galatians*^b, and styles Elymas the sorcerer a *child of the devil, and enemy of all righteousness*^c. Thus the Baptist allows the scribes and Pharisees no better appellation than a *generation of vipers*^d: and a greater than all these, even the pattern and perfection of gentleness and meekness, stigmatizes them with the scandalous titles of *fools* and *blind, hypocrites, and children of hell*^e.

These instances make it plain, that terms of disparagement and reproach are in some cases allowable: and particularly then, when (as St. Paul expresses it) men are *rebuked sharply*^b to render them sound in the faith: where charity, in a word, is at the bottom, and an high authority in the reprover gives such language countenance. But such examples are not to be drawn into precedents without great caution, and almost absolute necessity. Otherwise, where we design not to promote the party's or a public good by thus rousing or exposing him, but purely to vent a rage that boils over, and do all the mischief ill words are capable of, that is the scurrility condemned in the passage before us.

It will not, I hope, be expected I should enlarge in explanations or instances of these haughty and disdainful terms. Let it suffice to say, that they include all those opprobrious names whereby men signify their contempt of one another. Such as we wish the brawls and quarrels in our streets, or even those where better sense and breeding ought to exclude them, would permit us to continue in ignorance of. Such at least as decency excludes from hence; for indeed those contumelies and revilings are only contrived to spit the venom of a furious undisciplined mind out from a filthy and licentious tongue, without any regard to God, or our neighbour, or truth, or good manners. All these are comprehended under *raca* and *fool*. And as each of them

^a James ii. 20.^b Gal. iii. 1.^c Acts xiii. 10.^d Matt. iii. 7.^e Matt. xxiii. 15, 19.^f Titus i. 13.

is the overflowing of the very madness of anger, so is it attended with so long a train of sins and mischiefs as make it just with our Saviour to charge them with great guilt, and threaten them with heavy punishments. The nature of that, and reasonableness of these, I come to shew under my

II. Second head. That causeless anger and abusive language are highly offensive to Almighty God, we need no better proof than the declaration made here^c by Christ, that the devotions of people guilty in these respects can do them no service, nor shall any the most solemn sacrifice they can offer be accepted for their sin. But, besides this, we have almost infinite other passages to the like effect: some, that forbid all envying and variance and malice and wrath and *clamour and bitterness*, and not only *biting and devouring*, but even *despising and speaking evil of one another*. Some, that banish the persons addicted to these excesses from common society, and will not allow a Christian with a *raiser*, any more than with infidels and most abandoned profligates, no, *not to eat*. Some, that assure us God himself ranks these men with the blackest offenders; and that as *idolaters and fornicators and adulterers and abusers of themselves with mankind*, and *thieves and covetous and drunkards and extortioners*, shall not, so neither shall *revilers, inherit the kingdom of God*. And accordingly St. John's account of the heavenly Jerusalem shuts out of the gates of it all *dogs, and whosoever loveth and maketh a lie*. By which seem to be meant all these froward and quarrelsome, and (if I may so speak) curriish people, that bark and snarl at one another, and take a pleasure to foam out their own ill nature and rage in falsehood and bitterness and foulmouthed reproaches.

A heavy doom this, but what we shall discern to be just too, if we attend a little to the following particulars:

1. The great contradiction between such excessive fierceness of passion and virulence of speech, and the true temper of the Christian religion. This, above all things, labours to inspire peace and good humour, love and tenderness, meekness and mutual respect. Virtues that make society useful, and conversation sweet and easy. But these can never consist with those fretful and peevish and fiery dispositions that flame out into passion upon every trifle, and give their tongues a loose upon every character and reputation that unhappily stands in their way. Which puts me in mind of observing,

2. Secondly, That a great aggravation of these excesses in passion is, the manifest injustice of them. For these do not measure the actions or the qualities of their brethren by the true standard of right and wrong, of good and evil, but purely by their resentment and their demeanour to some one person in particular. The injury done, if any be done, is in such cases esteemed, not according to its demerit abstractedly considered, but by the affront or inconvenience that falls upon ourselves. That which another suffers we see without indignation, nay, we often excuse or vindicate; but let it come home to us, and it is so barbarous, so heinous and base, that we can never again think

^c Matt. v. 23, 24.
^f 1 Cor. v.

^d Eph. iv.
^e 1 Cor. vi.

^e James iv.
^h Rev. xxii. 15.

well of the person that did it, be the excellencies that recommend him to the general esteem of the world otherwise never so valuable and great. And yet the thing is plainly the same, to whomsoever done, under the same circumstances. But hence it appears that pride and partiality form all the angry man's judgments; that *self* is at the bottom of all this indignation: and daily experience proves the crime in general to have little concern in the matter, by that very different sense and notion men have of it, when it does not happen to light upon their own particular.

3. These angry resentments are manifest breaches of that charity which is the substance and end of the whole law. They are so, even when most private and suppressed; for charity does not regard the outward carriage only, but must govern the inmost affections of the soul. And he who thinks and wishes ill is uncharitable and unchristian, as well as he who speaks and acts maliciously. And if he who refrains his mouth from opprobrious language have not preserved his virtue inviolate, much less do they preserve it who give their passion vent, and allow themselves any manner of unbecoming liberties, under the heat and disorder of a provocation.

4. This shews the reasonableness of our Saviour's argument here, which makes causeless anger and contemptuous reproaches a branch of the sin of murder in particular. For so he does by reducing it within the compass of that commandment, *Thou shalt not kill*. The foundation of mischief and seeds of violence are laid in the first emotions of the soul. And there is little ground to believe that they who indulge to the beginnings of passion will be disposed, out of any true principle, to prevent the fatal consequences of it. But admitting them so disposed, yet, when the fire is kindled, every thing helps to blow it up, and it may not afterwards be in our power to get it under, although we would never so fain. ¹ *The beginning of strife* (as Solomon wisely observes) *is as when one letteth out water*. So long as the banks and dams are well fenced, and kept up to their due height, this runs in the proper channel; but when once those give way, a stream otherwise small makes a huge inundation, and bears down all before it, and knows no bounds. Thus one resentment opens the passage to a greater and fiercer, and one word draws on another, till at last all end in revenge and blood. They therefore who attend to the constitution of mankind, and how the sensual part and passions of the soul push us upon all manner of extravagance, cannot but see the necessity of keeping a strait rein; and that the only way to govern and restrain these is to curb and prevent their heat at first flying out: because then indeed is the time of subduing and restraining them to the best purpose. And they who reflect upon anger in particular, how this, above all other passions, blinds the reason, and carries the man out of himself; what furies and devils it makes where it hath got possession; what heartburnings and contentions, what tumult and confusion it creates, what wounds and deaths and desolations it scatters, must needs allow that the peace and safety of the world could never be secured but by crushing this venomous cockatrice in the egg.

Religion therefore had not answered its end, nor been a competent guard to human society, without leaving men answerable for the very tendencies and occasions, and wilfully taking the first steps toward such pernicious wickedness. For the hands of men could not be tied up from cruelty without tying up their tongues from exasperation and bitterness. Nor could those tongues again be withheld from evil-speaking, without a restraint from evil-thinking laid upon that part, out of whose abundance it is that the mouth does speak. So necessary for the common good it proves to root up the tree, and stop up the fountain. For while that tree is suffered to stand and live, it will produce corrupt fruit; and so long as that spring is left open, it will send forth poisonous and bitter streams.

I come now, in the last place, to propose some few remedies against the sins we have been treating of, by which we may hope to reform any past and to prevent any future guilt of this kind.

1. The first of these is humility, and a modest opinion of our own deserts. For pride, above all things, renders men peevish and capitious, jealous of being neglected, quickly provoked, and implacable when they are so. All which is the effect of insisting upon greater deference than others, who do not see with the same partial eyes, can discover to be their due. This likewise disposes such to return, though but a suspected affront, with the utmost insolence and contempt. ² *Proud and haughty scorner is his name, who dealeth in proud wrath.* And you observe that the vilifying titles condemned here by our Saviour are terms of diminution, and designed to import a wretched distance in the person spoken to, beneath the supposed perfections and dignity of the party uttering them. And thus, in truth, in every depression of our neighbour, there is a secret purpose, not only to grieve him but to exalt ourselves. Were but this swelling of the mind once well dispersed, we should be less suspicious; conversation would be no way uneasy, and caprice would utterly vanish. So says the wise man, ¹ *Only by pride cometh contention, but with the well advised is wisdom.* The considerate and the religious are calm and cool; not hastily inflamed, nor at any time outrageous. Which should they suffer themselves in, their character is forfeited, their virtue borne down and lost; for ^m *where envying and strife succeeds, there (according to St. James) is confusion and every evil work.*

2. A second remedy against these sins would be, frequently to reflect upon the horrible deformity and dreadful consequences of them. How anger turns men into wild beasts, and quite divests them of humanity and common sense. What agonies of mind, what disorder of the spirits, what despicable absurdities in behaviour, what fury and phrensy it hurries them into. What rash oaths, what horrible imprecations, what blasphemous, nay, what senseless profanations of God's most holy name, what virulence of expression, what base divulging of secrets, what injuries and violations of intimate confidences, which are sure to be condemned ever after, but perhaps can never be repaired again. These are things so notorious, and so incident to the passion

² Prov. xxi. 24.

¹ Prov. xiii. 10.

^m James iii. 16.

of anger, that, I verily believe, no man ever saw another violently transported with it, but he either pitied or despised him; and that none was ever so transported himself who was not guilty of something which, upon second reflection, and in cold blood, he did not find cause to repent, and be very much ashamed of. But the weightiest consideration of all is that of the vengeance these sins expose us to; a vengeance which the violent and revengeful hope in vain to escape while rigorous and bitter upon slight occasions; and yet they, in the meanwhile, have so great need of forbearance and clemency themselves, having in so many things offended both God and man.

3. Another excellent preservative would be, not to put ourselves into a passion for any thing till we have reason to be thoroughly persuaded of the truth, and have well considered the consequence of it.

It is one unfortunate obstruction to peace and good neighbourhood, that the things people are extremely grieved to hear, they are yet inquisitive after, and forward to believe. And this gives whisperers and slanderers too easy access, and too mischievous an advantage, when they, under pretence of mighty friendship, officiously inform us what others have behind our backs done or spoken concerning us. Thus have a thousand and ten thousand quarrels sprung up, which never had any real ground at all. Well were it therefore, if, upon such occasions, we could be prevailed upon to suspend our resentments till fully satisfied upon good proof that matters have not been misrepresented to us. Admirable to this purpose is the son of Sirach's adviceⁿ: *Admonish a friend, it may be he hath not done it, and if he have done it, that he do it no more. Admonish thy friend, it may be he hath not said it, and if he have, that he speak it not again. Admonish a friend, for many times it is a slander, and believe not every tale.*

But if the thing be true, yet it may not be worth our resentment; and therefore its quality and circumstances should also be carefully and candidly examined. And could we once bring ourselves to this resolution and temper, the business I am labouring for were done. All hasty and precipitate passion would effectually be prevented: for in the time of that consideration our minds would find leisure to cool, and we should scarce ever be angry at all; but certainly never *without a cause*, nor violent and bitter with one. Thus would a world of misunderstandings be laid asleep, and of mischievous quarrels be stifled in the birth. The greater, much greater part whereof, I firmly persuaded myself, would, if thoroughly inquired into, be found at the bottom to have been raised from falsehoods or from trifles. Thus we should not fail to deliver our own souls at least from infinite follies and inconveniences, from abundance of guilt here, and from our Lord's dreadful sentence in this passage of condemnation to eternal misery hereafter.

4. The last remedy in this case which I shall need to mention is, frequent communicating in the sacrament of the Lord's Supper. A feast of commemoration for the greatest instance of forgiveness that

ever was exhibited to mankind; of the highest provocations passed over in the most condescending and even amazing manner. The remembrance whereof ought to be more than sufficient to compose the most disorderly, the most deserved resentments. And a feast of love too, expressing the most sincere friendship for, the most entire union with, every member of his mystical body, whose death for his enemies is there represented. And how necessary, how indispensable a preparation for this approach to God, the restraining, subduing, and repenting of any former excesses of our passions in this kind is, we have all the evidence in the world, from God's refusing here to hold any friendly correspondence with, or to make any account of the prayers and most solemn acts of devotion when offered up by, persons defective in this one particular. For this is the plain connexion, this the natural importance of our Lord's declaration, immediately subjoined to the passage I have all along been considering; a declaration expressed indeed in terms that allude to the Jewish, but of equal significance and effect with regard to the Christian worship; (and I would to God all Christians that frequent the holy table, and entertain great hopes from so doing, would seriously lay it to heart;) *Therefore if thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath ought against thee; leave there thy gift before the altar, and (though thou hast proceeded thus far, yet even then) go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift.* I conclude this discourse with a remark, what careful provision our established church hath made for the punctual observance of this command. In the warning given of this sacrament to be administered, the caution runs thus: "If any of you be in envy, or malice, or in any other grievous crime, repent you of your sins, or else come not to that holy table; lest after the taking of that holy sacrament, the devil enter into you, as he entered into Judas, and fill you full of all iniquity, and bring you to destruction both of body and soul." In her exhortation at the day of administering, among other qualifications requisite to escape the judgments of God upon unworthy communicants, this is expressly mentioned: "Be in perfect charity with all men, so shall ye be meet partakers of these holy mysteries." And once more, when inviting the communicants to approach the blessed table, she does it in these terms: "Ye that do truly and earnestly repent you of your sins, and are in love and charity with your neighbours, &c., draw near with faith, and take this holy sacrament to your comfort, &c." Which two last warnings so repeated, even after the offertory, and some progress in the service already made, seem to have a particular regard to these words of our blessed Saviour. And all together abundantly prove, that if any uncharitable person intrude upon this ordinance, the guilt and danger consequent upon it is to be charged in no degree upon the church's negligence, but entirely upon the party's own presumption.

THE SEVENTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY.

THE COLLECT.

LORD of all power and might, who art the author and giver of all good things^a; Graft in our hearts the love of thy Name, increase in us true religion, nourish us with all goodness, and of thy great mercy keep us in the same; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

THE EPISTLE. Rom. vi. 19.

19 *I speak after the manner of men because of the infirmity of your flesh: for as ye have yielded your members servants to uncleanness and to iniquity unto iniquity; even so now yield your members servants to righteousness and to holiness.*

your whole care was to gratify your sinful lusts; let it now, after your conversion, be as entirely employed in virtue and holiness.

20 *For when ye were the servants of sin, ye were free from righteousness.*
ye were free from righteousness.

21 *What fruit had ye then in those things whereof ye are now ashamed? for the end of those things is death.*

22 *But now being made free from sin, and become servants to God, ye have your fruit unto holiness, and the end everlasting life.*

here, and eternal happiness hereafter,

23 *For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.*

wages deserved by sin; but that eternal life, attainable by holiness, neither is nor can be deserved: for this is a gift bestowed by God for the sake of his Son Jesus Christ our Lord.

19. I am now about to urge an argument, to the reasonableness whereof your own practice will testify. Ye know by experience, that before your conversion

your whole care was to gratify your sinful lusts; let it now, after your conversion, be as entirely employed in virtue and holiness.

20. And serve your new Master as diligently as your old one, without dividing your affections to sin now, in which righteousness had no part then.

21. This is but equal, supposing the advantage of both these services equal.

22. But it is far from being so: for there is only shame and death to be got by the one, whereas holiness are the reward of the other.

23. In which there is again this difference, that death is declared to be the

wages deserved by sin; but that eternal life, attainable by holiness, neither is nor can be deserved: for this is a gift bestowed by God for the sake of his Son Jesus Christ our Lord.

COMMENT.

St. Paul is here continuing to urge the Christian's obligations to holiness of life. In the Epistle for the last Lord's day he had argued from the true importance of baptism, and the engagement brought upon ourselves in that sacrament. But in this he proceeds from another topic, and accommodates himself more immediately to the circumstances of those converts to whom he wrote. He brings to remembrance their former condition, and their behaviour under it; and

thence by parity of reason infers the equity of the same care and zeal, in satisfying the duties of their present profession, with that which had all along been expressed to satisfy those corrupt appetites and passions under whose influence they had lived heretofore.

The force of this part of the argument lies in two propositions virtually included in it. The first is, that a condition of servitude implies an entire obedience to the party one professes to serve. The second, that all mankind are servants, though not all to the same master. Some to sin, the world, and the devil; others, to Almighty God and to virtue. The former is a state of nature, in which all are born under the dominion of those corrupt lusts that perpetually command and carry them into evil: the latter is a state of grace, which quickens men with a new and heavenly principle, commands and disposes them to good, and translates them into another service, which in truth is perfect freedom.

In this regard then the apostle appeals to their own practice and experience, whether in the former of these services they did not yield compliance to every suggestion of depraved nature readily and without reserve. They employed every faculty (he intimates) of their mind, every member of their body; grudged no part of their time and pains, boggled at no difficulties, thought nothing too much to do or to endure, for the gratifying those sensual inclinations, that riot or uncleanness, that ambition or covetousness, that pride or vainglory, that envy or revenge, which then exercised a dominion over them without any control. These never issued any order to do wickedly which to the very utmost of their might was not observed as soon as given.

This was indeed to answer the character of servants. And from the nature of that character it is that the apostle forms his argument in this place. For though the master was changed, yet the condition of these Romans was so far still the same, that they continued servants, and in that quality were obliged to the same entire obedience. So that, as formerly sin had the whole of their thought and time and endeavour, God and religion ought now to have them entire. To divide themselves between this new chosen and that old forsaken master, as it by no means could consist with their contract and their duty, so was it to deal with their present much worse than they had done with their past master. For he is not equally served, when any tergiversation, any interruption, any mixture of sin, is permitted to break the constant tenure of observance, indented for at their entrance into the retinue and family of God.

It is confessed, in the former of these services inclination and nature would put them forward; whereas the latter goes against the grain, and is discharged with difficulty and reluctance. But this objection too is balanced by those assistances for correcting the corruptions of nature, which are imparted so liberally, that none, who does his own part faithfully, shall have reason to complain for want of acceptance and success. And though in fact our obedience against the bent and infirmities of sense be embased with some alloy, yet still our dispositions and desires may and ought to be true to their point:

and provided they continue so, this is interpreted faithful and true serving of *righteousness unto holiness*; because the lower parts of the soul and the members of the body are upon these terms sure to stand clear of all deliberate and wilful transgression.

Thus far then St. Paul's argument holds good, supposing both services and the profits of them equal. But if the advantages do manifestly preponderate on one side, as no man can be reasonably blamed who changes for the better; so every one will naturally be more diligent in his business, where the duty is more agreeable, and the consideration for it more valuable. And therefore from these topics the apostle strengthens his reasoning; and to the equity of the relation they stood in, urged as you have seen in the *three* former verses of this day's epistle, he adds in the *three* last that most powerful motive of interest. For if a state of service alike in both cases required them to do as much, the profits accruing from their latter service required as much more from them in proportion as the advantages of being faithful and diligent are greater than any possible to be attained in the former.

Had this expostulation gone no farther than that sentence, *What fruit had ye then in those things*^b? one might be apt to think that nothing at all comes to men from the service of sin, but that it leaves them at giving over just where they began. And this sure were discouragement enough in all conscience, to labour for the wind, and undergo a world of drudgery for a master who will never consider us for our pains.

But, alas! this is far from being the true state of the case. For the words next following shew the emphasis of that question to lie, not in there being no consequences of such a service, but those that are a great deal worse than none. Would the limits of this discourse allow, or did the thread of the apostle's argument require it, nothing were easier than to prove that the toil and drudgery of a course of vice is insupportable; and that men would have unanswerable objections against religion, should it impose upon us commands in any degree so slavish and tyrannical as our own lusts and passions do. But St. Paul here is treating with converts that had broke their chains, and asserted their native liberty. And therefore he contents himself with the mention of such consequences as that service, even when forsaken, does naturally produce. Of these, one present and inseparable effect is *shame*; which to a mind of any ingenuity must needs be very grating and terrible. For what can make a man amends for the continual reproaches of his own breast, and the reflections of having long persisted in facts which cannot be remembered without the utmost confusion? On the contrary, when we are happily got loose from this tyranny, and become our own man, reason never fails to justify nor conscience to applaud our better choice. And these are satisfactions so suited to human nature, that all the commendations, nay all the honours and rewards capable of being bestowed by the whole world upon an ill action, are not an equivalent for the private pleasure and

peace that result from a testimony within, borne even to the most traduced, afflicted, and persecuted virtue.

Again. *The end of these things is death.* Death of the body, even when renounced and repented of. But otherwise death, that is, infinite and irreversible misery, of body and soul both. And what a lamentable consideration is this, that, after unconceivable labour and pain, a man hath not only purchased reproach and self-condemnation, but ensured to himself remorse and torment without interval or end! Whereas by employing his time in the gentle and agreeable service of God, he acts every day more and more in compliance with the dictates of reason, advances and improves human nature, exults and triumphs with inward peace and joy, which carry him through his work with alacrity and delight. But when that work is brought to a conclusion, he is paid and overpaid for all the difficulties in it by a bliss, of which all his former satisfactions were foretastes and pledges: a bliss therefore styled *life*, because all that is dear and desirable is implied and included in it; and a bliss that is life indeed, because subject to no decay from within, nor to any destruction from without.

There is yet one very remarkable circumstance behind, greatly to the advantage of a holy life. It is, that the *death* inflicted upon sin is the *wages* of it: what God hath expressly threatened, and given men sufficient warning of: and therefore what they, who know beforehand upon what terms they enslave themselves, and who have so many assistances and opportunities put into their hands of being free and happy, do by their obstinacy deserve. But the *eternal life* awarded to good men is what the very best of them neither do nor ever can deserve. For what can we deserve of reward hereafter for embracing that virtue which so amply rewards its own practice here? How can a happiness be strictly merited, between the eternity whereof, and the very short term we serve for it, there is no manner of proportion? What claim can an obedience lay which is interrupted with multitudes of backslidings and neglects, each whereof would in rigour evacuate its title? We may indeed deserve our punishments, because sin is our own, entirely our own act. But can we with any good sense be said to deserve a recompense, and such a recompense, for acts not entirely, not originally ours? and that at his hands too, whose free grace and good Spirit it is that works in us both the will and the deed? Most justly therefore doth the apostle put the difference here between *wages* and *gift*; that is the effect of justice, this of bounty; a bounty, not inclined by any consideration moving it on our part, but redounding to and descending upon us by and for the sake of a Person who hath, it must be confessed, merited it to the uttermost; even Jesus Christ, whose servants we are, who condescended to purchase it at the price of his own blood. And therefore not unto us be the praise, or any part of it, but unto him be honour and glory and thanks for this his unspeakable gift.

THE SEVENTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY.

THE GOSPEL. St. Mark viii. 1.

1 *In those days the multitude being very great, and having nothing to eat, Jesus called his disciples unto him, and saith unto them,*

Compare this account with St. Matt. ch. xv. 32, &c.

2 *I have compassion on the multitude, because they have now been with me three days, and have nothing to eat:*

3 *And if I send them away fasting to their own houses, they will faint by the way: for divers of them came from far.*

4 *And his disciples answered him, From whence can a man satisfy these men with bread here in the wilderness?*

5 *And he asked them, How many loaves have ye? And they said, Seven.*

6 *And he commanded the people to sit down on the ground: and he took the seven loaves, and gave thanks, and brake, and gave to his disciples to set before them; and they did set them before the people.*

7 *And they had a few small fishes: and he blessed, and commanded to set them also before them.*

8 *So they did eat, and were filled: and they took up of the broken meat that was left seven baskets.*

9 *And they that had eaten were about four thousand: and he sent them away.*

10 *And straightway he entered into a ship with his disciples, and came into the parts of Dalmanutha.*

COMMENT.

THE miracle recorded here, though differing in some few circumstances, yet being the same with regard to the almighty operation effecting it, and the uses proper to be made of it, as that in St. John vi, my reader is referred to a discourse on that subject for the fourth Sunday in Lent.

I only add, that the parts of Dalmanutha, ver. 10, answer to the coasts of Magdala, Matt. xv. 39^c. Magdala is said to have been a town so considerable, as to give name to a tract of the country about it. Hence some have thought Dalmanutha a village within that division. Others, taking Magdala for the town of that name only, sup-

pose our Lord to have come into that part of the coast between this and Dalmanutha, so that either of them might be named indifferently. These places lie near each other, in the half tribe of Manasse, beyond Jordan.

THE EIGHTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY.

THE COLLECT.

O God, whose never-failing providence ordereth all things both in heaven and earth^d; We humbly beseech thee to put away from us all hurtful things, and to give us those things which be profitable for us; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

THE EPISTLE. Rom. viii. 12.

12 *Brethren, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live after the flesh.* 12. The obligation that now lies upon us is, not to live any longer by that carnal principle which prevailed under the law, but by the grace of God's Spirit, which is our rule and guide under the gospel.

13 *For if ye live after the flesh, ye shall die: but if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live.* 13. Because the former cannot free us from the death inflicted as a punishment of sin: but the latter secures to us the resurrection of our bodies and immortal happiness.

14 *For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God.* 14. The reason is, that such a life gives evidence of our being God's children.

15 *For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father.* 15. And so no longer in a servile state, but adopted into the family.

16 *The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God.* 16. All which is proved by communicating the Spirit of God's natural to us his adopted sons.

17 *And if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together.* 17. But adoption is in order to inheriting; and since this inheritance cannot be attained in the present life, it follows, that this relation of sonship necessarily infers a future life; wherein, even after death, that inheritance may be possessed. In the glories of which future state we shall partake with Christ, if content in the present state to partake with him in suffering.

^d Psalms cxix. 91; Prov. xvi. 33.

COMMENT.

AFTER several other preeminences of the gospel above the Jewish law, and every other dispensation antecedent to it, St. Paul does in this chapter insist upon that most valuable one, of securing to them that obey it life and a happy immortality. This he proves to be an excellence peculiar to the gospel, from the means whereby it is effected. The first of these is justification, or a release from the guilt and punishment of sin, whereby death prevailed upon all mankind, forasmuch as all had sinned. This benefit Christ obtained for us, by himself becoming our sin-offering, the only true and expiatory sacrifice. And so taking off the condemnation due to us, by undergoing death on the behalf of the whole human nature wherein he suffered. And to prove this an advantage peculiar to the gospel, God is said, by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh^c, and so by his sacrifice for sin condemning sin in the flesh, to have done what the weakness of the law could not do.

But this weakness is observed to have been *through the flesh*^d too, the prevalence of that sensual and carnal principle, which, by betraying men into sin, rendered them still more obnoxious to death, in proportion as the precepts of the law were multiplied. In order therefore to escape that misery, sanctification is necessary also. Now this is effected by the assistances and influences of God's holy Spirit, correcting that corrupt principle called *the flesh*. Sanctifying grace rescues from the dominion of sin for the future, as justifying grace releases from the penalty of sin past. And in regard no other covenant ever indented for the communications of this Spirit^e; in regard these also are merited by and consequent upon the death of Christ^f; in regard the things that make for life and peace cannot be loved, pursued, or compassed without these^g, nor God pleased with any of our works^h which are not agreeable, and indeed owing to, this Spiritⁱ, (for this is a distinguishing character of them who belong to Christ;) from hence it is, that happiness and immortality are, in this second respect also, represented as privileges which give the Christian a just preference above any other religion whatsoever.

But whence, it may be said, all these vain boasts of immortality, while it is plain that even Christians die in common with other men? It is confessed. Nor does the apostle attempt the absurdity of denying it^m, but places their privilege in being restored to life, and such a future life as far excels any advantages possible to be reaped from their continuance in the present life by never dying at all. This, he contends, is a benefit entirely owing to Christ. For a right understanding whereof, I shall briefly state the case as it stood with mankind in general without Christ; and as it now, by virtue of his sufferings, stands both with human nature at large, and with them in particular who partake of his Spirit and his holiness.

The original condition of man appears to have been framed for bliss

^c Ver. 3.^f Ver. 3.^g Ver. 4, 5.^h Ver. 6.ⁱ Ver. 7.^k Ver. 8.^l Ver. 9.^m Ver. 10, 11.

and immortality. So that death was no part of the first creation, but (as this apostle observes)^a had been introduced by sin. Not only actual dying then, but even the capacity of dying, was properly a penalty. And from a state, in which they *might* not, and supposing them not to have transgressed, *could* not have died, our first parents sunk themselves and all their posterity at once into a condition in which they could not but die; nay, and so die as no longer to be able either to preserve themselves from sorrow and trouble in this life, or to rescue either their bodies from corruption or their souls from misery whenever God should think fit to call them hence.

Now, in regard the whole human nature had sinned in Adam, this bodily death still passes upon all men. But then, in consideration of the whole human nature again suffering this punishment in the person of the Son of God, the bodies of all mankind shall be restored to life again, and so united to their souls as to suffer no second separation. The souls too of such as, strictly speaking, are Christ's, do, together with their bodies, enter into a state of bliss endless and unconceivable. Thus full reparation is made for the loss mankind in general sustained by the transgression of the first Adam^o; in that, as then all died by one, so now all live again by one common representative. Nay, this is more than reparation; in regard death was inflicted for one offence, but the release is from many, each whereof had incurred the same penalty. But for that other death of the soul, which men bring upon themselves, they who oppose those lusts that open the way to it, and are guided by that Spirit which is the author and principle of all goodness to lapsed man, are, notwithstanding the necessity of bodily death, infinite gainers, and in much better circumstances than if God should have brought them back to those of their common ancestor, even at the time of his innocence. It was, as I observed, possible for him not to die; but, because he was under a possibility of sinning, it is evident he was likewise under a possibility of dying; and consequently of continuing in death for ever, supposing no redemption by a second Adam. Christians, the very best of them, have, it is confessed, afflictions to conflict with, and bodily death to undergo; but then from these they are translated to another state, where they do not only neither sin nor die, but where it is absolutely impossible for them either to sin or to die any more.

And this is the argument made use of at the tenth and eleventh verses; the certainty of a resurrection to bliss and glory for all them who submit themselves to the guidance of the Holy Spirit: a Spirit who is a quickener as well as a sanctifier; the giver of holiness and the giver of life; the giver of the former as an earnest and certain foretaste of the latter. For proof of this he argues that the graces of this Spirit are a mark of the Christian's sonship, and that that sonship was imparted by adoption. A method always taken in order to confer on the party so adopted a right to inherit the estate of the party adopting. ^p But now in regard the benefit here mentioned is such as the present state is not capable of, it follows that there must of necessity be another and more perfect state in reserve, wherein the

^a Ch. v. 12.^o See ch. v. 12, &c.^p Ch. viii. 14—17.

profits of this adoption may be fully made good and enjoyed. And it also follows that the certain prospect of so complete a happiness is an abundant encouragement and support against any afflictions of the life we now lead, and against the fear of that death of the body which shall one day be swallowed up in that endless and infinitely better life. Of which life the actual possession and glories of that *natural* Son of God, who was once dead but now lives for evermore, give infallible assurance to his *adopted* sons.

Such seems to be the connexion and true force of the apostle's argument in this place. Which, so far as it regards our sonship, and the inferences properly resulting from thence, hath been largely considered some time ago¹. The privilege of *inheriting* consequent to that relation, I then referred to this occasion, concerning which it shall suffice to make some few remarks as briefly as I can.

Those words at the seventeenth verse, *If children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ*, are expressions taken from among men; and, as was hinted before, do particularly allude to the customs and methods and design of adoption. My intention at present is to assign some reasons wherefore the happiness of good men hereafter, which the holy Scripture hath elsewhere mentioned by sundry other figures and expressions, should here be represented under the notion of an *inheritance*; what we may be allowed to draw from hence for our comfort and advantage, and what engagements we ought upon this account to think ourselves under in point of duty and obedience.

1. Now first, the Epistle for the last Lord's-day sets forth *eternal life* in the quality of a *gift*². And I there shewed it to be truly so; and that we are bound to esteem and thankfully to receive it as such. And this was a very proper representation for that place, where the apostle designed to humble men under a sense of their sin, and the punishments thus incurred; and to magnify God's grace in not only forbearing to execute the justice they had deserved, but in bestowing a happiness which they neither did nor could deserve. But here his business is to fortify men against the hardships and temptations of a malicious and dangerous world, distresses and persecutions, and even death itself. Now, in order hereunto, it was necessary to propose their future happiness in terms of the utmost assurance, and such as might justify the most absolute dependence upon the possession of it. But now a gift implies the disposer to be so perfectly at his own liberty, that, if he bestow it, it is a favour and an obligation; if he withhold it, no hurt is done, or occasion of complaint given. And which way could this minister that firm and confident persuasion, which frail and yielding flesh and blood finds little enough, to sustain faith against sense, and to render spiritual and distant joys an over-balance for present and bodily sufferings? Yet even to this effect, great and difficult as experience proves it to be, must the notion of an inheritance be admitted for an adequate cause. This naturally turns our thoughts upon the manner in use among men for securing estates to their posterity. It describes Christians, not as younger sons,

¹ Epistle for Sunday after Christmas.

² Rom. vi. 23.

whose portions the parent hath kept in his own disposal, but as so many firstborn, for whom a certain provision is made, deeds of conveyance irrevocable executed, and a sure claim in law to all the honours and advantages which by the ancestor's quality are possible to descend in the elder line. And this being the best grounded expectation (called therefore very significantly *a settlement*) among men, when Almighty God condescends to call us *heirs*, such are hereby justified in the highest degree of filial trust; they may without arrogance plead their title; nay, they cannot suspect that this conveyance will not hold good, without incurring the guilt of a dishonourable reflection upon the kindness and truth of their Father which is in heaven.

Now the duties arising from this consideration are, a steadfast affiance in him whose promises are sure, and his purposes unchangeable. But that affiance must be built upon a holy life, as its proper foundation and only true support: for even heirs in the eye of the law may evacuate their own title, by provoking their parents to cut off an entail, or by an attainder that shall forfeit their pretensions. It is true, immortal existence shall be every man's portion, but whether we shall exist in happiness or misery will depend upon our own behaviour. For our Father hath kept it still in his power to punish undutiful and obstinate children. As St. Paul acquaints us here, that those sons only are heirs whose being *led by the Spirit of God* proves them to be sons indeed. And for them who are such, I would earnestly recommend another duty, naturally deduced from the consideration before us, which is, the love and study of the holy Scriptures. These are the deeds in which our title is set forth; the privileges we are endowed with, and the conditions of our tenure, are to be learned only from hence; and therefore our time can be nowhere better employed, nowhere with greater profit, if we would secure, nowhere with greater delight, if we duly value and desire, this blest inheritance.

2. The same may be said, secondly, in regard of the certainty and duration of this future happiness. The stability whereof is by the allusion before us very fitly intimated. For, whereas other tenures are determined to a certain period of time, estates of inheritance submit to no such limitations, but descend successively to all posterity, and are fixed as firm as the condition of this world will allow any thing to be. Thus the bliss we are encouraged to promise ourselves in that other and better world is a lasting and unchangeable good. No term of years can wear our title out, no accident can deprive us of the possession. The excellence of the joys prepared for good men is a consideration which alone would justify our most ardent desires and eager pursuits of them. But that which crowns all other commendations of them is, the leaving no room for fears and melancholy prospects, the conceiving heaven to be a *continuing city*, a permanent abode. Without this, the more exquisite its delights are, the more afflicting must even the most distant possibility of parting with them be. But this fills the mind with perfect acquiescence, and raises our ideas of such a Father's love, who hath provided a settlement for his children that nothing can waste or shake, that even our own

hopes and wishes cannot look beyond, nay, that our utmost stretch of thought cannot distinctly comprehend, but must depend upon his word and truth for the belief of.

And shall I need to say that our duty resulting from this happy circumstance is, to take off our affections from *things on the earth, and to set them on things above*? to contemplate that promised enjoyment and its advantages, which so manifestly distinguish it from all attainable here below, where time and casualty have such an uncontrolled dominion, and scarce any man arrives to so absurd a degree of extravagance as to imagine it but barely possible for his tenure to continue always? Particularly, how should this reconcile the thoughts and approaches of death to a good man, who hath reason to esteem it a desirable translation, from a state where all things are in a perpetual flux, to one where all are constant and immutable; from one, where even our imperfect happiness is bounded within a very short space, to one, where alone we can be completely happy, and where we are sure to be completely so for ever and ever.

3. As I observed before, that our future happiness is sometimes mentioned in the quality of a *gift*, so is it at other times under the notion of a reward. And hence arises a third convenience of this allusion, in that it takes away all ground for those vain presumptions we are so apt to cherish concerning the merit of our own performances. It is very possible for a steward, or one that in much meaner capacity retains to the family, to approve himself more useful to its interests than any child in it. But whatever recompense such fidelity may deserve, yet can no legal claim to the inheritance be grounded upon it; because this hath alliance and blood for its foundation. And therefore St. Paul's argument proceeds, *If sons, then heirs*. Now our sonship and adoption is God's free act, conferred at our first entrance into covenant with him, and consequently at a time when there is as yet no service that can be pleaded. So that the notion of heaven being an inheritance, and that of meriting by our own works, are plainly incompatible, and will upon due examination be found mutually to destroy each other.

This therefore teaches every Christian to obey with the profoundest humility, and to expect a compensation with all possible thankfulness: to acknowledge the grace and munificence of Almighty God, and to remember what affection as well as duty should be paid to so liberal and kind a Father. Which leads me to consider,

4. Fourthly, how fitly this metaphor of an inheritance is chosen to make us sensible of that fulness of joy imported by it, and what a plentiful provision this heavenly Father hath laid up in store for every child of his. That we are not dealt with like younger branches of a family, who must be content with such scanty proportions as can commodiously be spared out of an estate, the gross whereof is reserved for keeping up the honour or the name in that one who hath the good fortune to be the eldest. The narrowness of our possessions upon earth requires such distinctions and wary distributions. But it is the preeminence of our heavenly inheritance, that there will be

enough for every partaker of it. All that the largest heart can ask or think; and no one child shall feel himself straitened there by any other's abundance. So far from this, that every one's faculties shall be enlarged to render him still capable of more and more, and the joy of every other glorified spirit shall be an addition to each one's own.

And is it not a natural effect of this particular, to raise our love and desires of that all-sufficient bliss, and in the meanwhile to inspire us with meekness and patience and contentment under any afflictions that shall befall us here? We are now in the quality of heirs under age, and it is reasonable we submit to proper methods of education and discipline. In which if some hardships be undergone, yet are they necessary for qualifying us to make a becoming figure when we shall come to be put into possession. Now this the author to the Hebrews affirms to be the express case of the sons of God, whom he *chastens* for their mighty *profit*, that they may be *partakers of his holiness*¹. Most reasonably therefore do those children act who comply readily with his measures of improvement, and refer all to their heavenly Father's wisdom, in that spirit of contentment and entire resignation, of which the Church hath set us a pattern in her Collect for this day; teaching us that not any of these things can come upon us without his knowledge and appointment; and therefore humbly *beseeching him, whose never-failing providence ordereth all things both in heaven and earth, to put away from us all hurtful things, and to give us those things which be profitable for us, through Jesus Christ our Lord.*

THE EIGHTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY.

THE GOSPEL St. Matt. vii. 15.

15 *Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves.* 15. The way to life (mentioned ver. 13, 14) you will be in some danger of being seduced from by the designing craftiness of some ill men, who, personating teachers and promoters of truth and virtue, do in reality design the overthrow of both.

16 *Ye shall know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles?* 16. But in time their own wicked practices, and the pernicious consequences of their principles, will discover what they are. For these will naturally retain the good or the evil of the man and his opinions.

17 *Even so every good tree bringeth forth good fruit; but a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit.*

18 *A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit.*

19 *Every tree that bringeth not forth*

¹ Heb. xii. 5—10.

good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire.

20 *Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them.*

21 *Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven.*

21. It is not the bare profession or the teaching of my gospel, that shall carry any man to heaven; but the conscientious and diligent observance of the rules of life laid down there.

COMMENT.

In treating of this passage, I shall endeavour to explain those fruits which our Lord here directs us to observe in order to the discovery of false teachers; and withal to observe, as briefly as I can, how proper and sufficient a mark these are to detect them by.

1. I will consider the fruits directed to here in order to the discovery of *false prophets* or teachers. I say *prophets* or teachers, because not only such as foretold future events, but they also whose profession and errand it was to instruct the people in their duty (and in this place they especially), are signified under this title of *prophets*.

Now in this consideration it behoves us to take good heed: because the mistaking our marks, and fixing upon any that are not such, spoils all, and leaves us as liable to be deceived and undone by the falsehood of those prophets, as if no such marks had ever been left us at all.

Some few seem to lay a stress upon that expression of *coming*^o, as if our Saviour meant that these *false prophets* are not sent by God, upon his errand, or with his commission, as the true always are, but *come* of their own head, and undertake to teach without any competent authority or lawful call so to do.

And this manner of coming is no doubt a weighty objection against such men. It argues want of modesty, great arrogance indeed, when they affect and usurp a dominion over the consciences of their brethren; it speaks a factious spirit, and contempt of discipline and good order, when they thrust themselves into so important a charge without the regular methods of attaining it: it ministers just cause of jealousy, and provokes us to suspect them of falsehood and evil design, who refuse to submit their abilities and their principles to the trial of public persons appointed to examine and approve and judge who be duly qualified to lead the flock, and who are unfit to be trusted with so great a care. Upon all these accounts the *coming*, thus understood, may very well be allowed to put us upon our guard against the bold and forward senders of themselves. But certainly this sense of the word is little if at all concerned in the place before us.

For this cannot be such a note of distinction as shall enable us to distinguish between the wolf and the sheep. He who wants a legal authority may possibly teach nothing but truth, and intend nothing but good. This, I say, may possibly be, but we have reason to fear

it very seldom is so. On the other hand, he who hath such an authority may abuse it to vile purposes; he may betray the trust committed to him; and, though a rightful shepherd as to all outward qualifications, may lead the sheep astray. Nay, he may take the advantage of his character for doing it with more security and efficacy. Error then does not inseparably go along with the prophets who thus come; nor truth with them that are sent. And indeed the *fruits* here seem to be somewhat subsequent to their coming; and the judgment to be made concerning them to be formed upon the manner, not of their coming, but of their behaviour afterwards, and the effects of their exercising the office of teachers.

2. Others, therefore, and those interpreters of eminence and renown, by *fruits* here understand the lives and conversations of the *prophets*. And then our Saviour's admonition will import thus much, that men are not rashly and hastily to give in to the doctrines of their teachers, till convinced by the piety and virtue of their behaviour that they are approved by God. For truth and holiness spring from the same root, and commendable practices are the genuine product of sound principles. On the other hand, some vices there are so natural to false teachers, that it is hardly possible to evade the discovery they make*. Such are, declining of hardships by shuffling and tampering with their consciences, when the cause of religion calls them to suffer: indirect promoting their own private interest by soothing their hearers, the wealthy and honourable among them especially, in their follies and vices: insisting with heat and vehemence upon controverted points of little or no consequence to the substance and advancement of true Christianity; taking indecent liberties in aspersing others, particularly persons of authority and power, that such bold and free speaking may acquire them the reputation of uncommon impartiality and sanctity. When men accommodate themselves and their doctrines to these or the like purposes, they soon betray their caution to be the effect of cowardice, their pretended compliance and good manners to be covetousness and ambition, their zeal to be pride and faction, and their officious reproving to be envy and censoriousness. And although such a man may dissemble for a while, yet hypocrisy, like every other violence upon nature, is of no long continuance. The sheep's clothing will drop off, and the wolf will shew himself, provided we have patience, and take care to watch the disguise narrowly. But if a teacher be, and persevere in being, a man of blameless behaviour, we may depend upon safety under his guidance, and that he is rightly fitted for becoming an instrument of good to us. For the tree is to be known by his fruit, and the man by his manners; these are virtuous and holy, and so warrant our concluding his doctrine to be orthodox and profitable.

This, I say, is a second construction put upon the passage. Which yet, with all due respect to the great names that have acquiesced in it, appears to be attended with two difficulties, not easy to be got over. For by making a teacher's life the test of his doctrine, it seems to be supposed, first, that all men's principles and practices are really, and

at bottom, both of a piece; and, secondly, that we may clearly and sufficiently understand whether our teachers be truly good or bad men.

The former supposition seems necessary upon this account, because, admitting any inconsistency between a man's real principles and his practice, no certain conclusion can be drawn from the nature of his works to the nature of his doctrine; and so those works can be no certain mark. The second seems likewise necessary, because, granting that every teacher cannot be so thoroughly known to another, as shall enable him positively to pronounce that such a one is a good or an ill man, it will follow that those works can be no mark at all. These are objections worthy a little attention, and therefore I will consider them distinctly.

1. It is but too manifestly false, that all men live just as they teach or as they believe, or that their principles and practices are at bottom both of a piece. At first sight one would think it (and doubtless it is) very natural they should be so; but when one looks more closely into the matter, many substantial reasons are to be found why in fact it is otherwise. The infinite transgressions against the light of nature, or against the acknowledged precepts of revealed religion, (even when the present dictates and checks of conscience conspire to dissuade, to deter from them,) are undeniable evidences of this case. And how absurd soever it may appear for a man to act counter to his own sense and judgment, yet will our wonder cease when it is remembered, how differently men are moved to imbibe any opinion from the manner in which they are moved in point of behaviour and action. Thus the thing will soon be made appear as practicable as experience proves it to be common.

For when they embrace any persuasion, this is a work of time and debate; they are presumed to examine, and see on which side the weight of the cause lies, and to cast in their assent accordingly. But an opinion thus embraced, though lodged in the mind, is not thereby enabled to influence the conversation. For the faith capable of this effect must be much more than a bare and historical assent to the truth. It must be a lively and vigorous persuasion; it must be well digested, warmly applied, always at hand to oppose against temptations, resolute to resist, and strong to overcome. Now this is a frame of mind which no man at all times is in. For, let the judgment be never so rightly informed, yet the infirmities of corrupt nature are so many, the passions so violent, the surprises upon it so sudden, and the assaults so thick, that even well intending men cannot always behave themselves as they would do at leisure, in cool blood, and when reason could be fairly brought to bear against the bias of appetite and interest. It is indeed a good man's care to watch and keep a strict guard over himself; but a bad man, though overpowered by his own fault, does not presently renounce and give up those tenets which tell him he ought to subdue his appetites. A sound belief and knowledge in teaching depend in great measure upon good parts, serious study, fair arguing, and sound judgment. But the living up to what we know and believe depends upon a thousand actions and

events, upon things done in heat and hurry, when reason is disturbed and thoughts divided, and the guards of our souls either asleep through frailty or borne down by some rebellious inclination. So that even good men may in acting swerve sometimes from their principles; and bad men, when they think and reason sedately, may be found to retain very sound opinions. These may have very discerning faculties, and may use their wit and their learning in the defence of religion; and yet they may not mortify their affections, so as to adorn the cause they can very notably defend; but may act such things as, when compared with the principles acknowledged by them, are perfectly incongruous and absurd; and such as themselves do in their soberer reflections disallow and detest. In a word, every man, who stands self-condemned for sinning against his own conscience, is an instance that principles and practices are not always of a piece. And if a man may believe aright, and yet live amiss, then his actions can be no standard for receiving or rejecting his opinions; for, according to this state of the case, a *good tree may bring forth evil fruit*, quite contrary to our Lord's observation, ver. 18.

On the other hand, men of false and dangerous principles may also do good actions, as they are commonly called and understood. They may do them from shame, and fear of reproach; they may do them for interest or reputation, out of covetousness, pride, or vainglory; nay, they may do them to qualify themselves for passing better upon the world, and for deceiving more effectually. For, supposing the life of a *prophet* no competent rule to judge his doctrines by, yet must his example be granted of considerable influence to draw followers after him. A profligate and vile teacher is naturally (as he deserves to be) declined and abhorred; as a pious and exemplary one is very powerful to persuade. This they are sensible of who so often make an affectation of uncommon austerities and preciseness a part of that *sheep's clothing* in which they disguise themselves. But when the wolf is stript, then it appears that such extraordinary sanctimony was all to serve a turn; only that *the people might fall unto them*, and because *thereout they suck no small advantage*. If then not only men of sound belief and opinion may act and live disagreeably to their own sense and profession, but also men of unsound and dangerous opinions may put on a face of virtue, and do good with ill design; it follows, I think, that our Lord's meaning must extend to somewhat else besides the prophet's works. Otherwise his parabolical allusion will not hold good in either branch of it. For at this rate, a *good tree may bring forth evil fruit*, according to the former, and an *evil tree may bring forth good fruit*, according to the latter of these instances; i. e. admitting the doctrines and principles of the *prophet* to be the *tree*, and the actions of his life for the *fruit*, or a competent mark given whereby to distinguish the *tree*.

2. But there is yet a *second* difficulty under which this construction labours. It is, that it supposes the spiritual state of these *prophets* capable of being so perfectly known, that their hearers shall from thence be able to pronounce each of them a truly good or ill man. This difficulty indeed is far from being equal in both the parts of it.

Wickedness is sometimes so manifest, so shameless, so exceeding enormous, that one may be assured of another's bad state so long as he continues in that course of life. But hypocrisy is often so dexterous in the arts of dissembling, that it shall not be possible to pursue it through all its windings and doublings, so as peremptorily to determine who is the truly good man. The farthest we can go is to words and actions. And these will not furnish matter sufficient to go upon. For every man's virtue must stand or fall by the sincerity of his heart, the bent of his will, the ends he proposes, and the regularity of his measures in prosecuting those ends. Things in great part locked up from human sight, and such as lie open to the Searcher of hearts only¹; and therefore by him only is the good and evil of every man truly understood. A man may pray for real devotion, and he may pray to be seen of men; he may give alms out of charity, and he may give out of ostentation². He may be of a sad countenance when he fasts, out of hearty sorrow and godly remorse, and he may look sad because he hath disfigured his face on purpose to appear mortified to the world. He may *preach Christ* out of zeal and *good-will*, and he may *preach him even of envy and strife*³. Meanwhile they to whom nothing appears in evidence but the prayer, and the alms, and the countenance, and the preaching, cannot be certain in the cause of these things. We ought, it is true, always to hope and think the best; but a judgment of charity is too weak a foundation to build our faith upon. For that is but passing a favourable sentence upon somewhat not perfectly known. And surely much needs not be said to convince men, that what cannot be perfectly known itself cannot be admitted for a competent rule to judge and know other things by. Consequently, if our utmost skill cannot penetrate into the holiness or hypocrisy of a prophet, this cannot be the adequate notion of *fruits* here, which are declared a sufficient distinction to judge his doctrines by.

III. Hence some have directed us to a third characteristic, and conceive our Lord to mean the natural consequences and effects of the doctrines themselves; and the practices, which, if pursued through all those consequences, they lead their assertors and their hearers into.

These interpreters have rightly considered, that the *false prophets*, in the place before us, were men making outward profession of the Christian faith; that, as in such cases is usual, they took advantage from truth to propagate error; that all deceivers begin well, and do not let those they intend to seduce into the secret at once, but by fair and unexceptionable pretences insinuate themselves into the esteem and affections of the people; that, when by degrees their authority is established, and their followers at their devotion, they then open the scene with artifice, scatter their poison cunningly gilded over, and make such vile impressions, as an implicit belief and obedience, and a partial admiration of their persons, hath opened the way and rendered their adherents ripe for.

¹ Epistle for the third Sunday in Advent.

² Matt. vi.

³ Phil. i. 15.

Upon this account our blessed Saviour is presumed to command in the passage now before us, that we do not hastily yield ourselves to the garb and outward appearance of the prophets; but that we follow warily, and look well whither it is they would lead us. If they take occasions of ingratiating themselves by doctrines confessedly good, and afterwards begin to unmask, and let fall such as are a breach of or disparagement to piety and charity; if they indulge formal superstitions, lay mighty stress upon idle ceremonies, place religion where it is not, and pretend to dispense with the weightier matters of the law; if they undervalue justice and common honesty in dealing, and the duties peculiar to our respective relations and condition in the world; if we find them tampering with state-affairs, flattering princes, and countenancing oppression and tyranny, or cajoling subjects, and under the name of *liberty* encouraging disobedience and faction; if they sow seeds of discord, and kindle or foment division and separation, and mutual hatred and heats; if they would persuade us to lie for God, or to do evil that good may come; in short, if they set aside any known duty or advance any known sin—these are *evil fruits*, and we may depend upon it the *tree* which brings them forth is a corrupt *tree*: the prophets, I mean, persuading, and the doctrines tending to them, are such as our Lord commands us to beware of and avoid.

But then, upon this occasion, we must take care to put a difference (for a mighty difference there is) between the prophet being guilty of these things in his practice, and infusing or justifying them in his doctrine. No preacher is free from some sin, but I hope none is so abandoned as to proclaim liberty to any. A man may commit evil without calling it good; and he may neglect good without traducing it with the name of evil. And in them who do so, the fault reaches no farther than their private and personal capacity. A scandalous prophet hath a terrible account to make, and the worse for bringing his office and character into disesteem. But the wickedness of his life, which renders him one of the worst of men, does not prove him a false teacher. For to such as these, *who say and do not*, is our Saviour's command with regard to the Pharisees to be applied. *They sit in Moses' seat* (have a regular call and just authority): *all therefore whatsoever they bid you observe, that observe and do; but do not ye after their works*^a. It were greatly to be wished, that every one of our lives recommended and represented our sermons; but where they do not, he that speaks is a prophet still: a wicked, but not a *false* prophet; for he condemns his own actions out of his own mouth. And the duty of his people upon this occasion is, not to withdraw from his teaching, or separate from his communion; but to attend to, and edify under, and pray for him. To do the good which his instructions plainly inculcate, but not to follow the evil which his example may be thought to encourage. All this agrees exactly with our Lord's discourse, who in this warning was not concerned to take notice of the personal corruptions of *false prophets*; but of such only as affected their public

^a Matt. xxiii. 2, 3.

capacity. And such most properly are those pernicious notions and practices which the doctrines they instil naturally lead to, and are justly chargeable withal.

Once more, which draws this matter to a point. Of these corruptions and consequences it may safely be affirmed, that they come always of evil; and of the true and sound doctrines, that they always come of good. In this case the fruit never degenerates, but discriminates the tree on which it grew. Which is equivalent with saying, that these are a certain rule to detect false teachers by. For,

1. These evidences cannot be counterfeited, as other marks may. The vulgar are often deluded by bold pretenders to immediate impulses of the Spirit, and told, these supersede the necessity of an ordinary and legal call. *Many*, St. Paul observes, are *deceived by good words and fair speeches*^b; nay, our Lord here foretells even *miracles in his name* boasted of by persons whom yet he *never knew*. But still these advantages are but in the quality of leaves. They add much to the beauty, but they do not sufficiently prove the goodness of the tree. The thorn and the thistle carry a gayser blossom and a more fragrant flower than the vine and the fig-tree: but the grape and the fig give these a just preeminence. In like manner, seducers may make some plausible appearance, but this is pomp and show; for the substance and solidity lies in the principles they advance. And no disguise can hide these from a careful examiner. For no opinion truly good can promote any moral evil; nor any opinion really evil lead to the practice of moral good. In this case the tree that is once corrupt will always be so, and nothing but corruption can come from it: and that doctrine which is once good will continue such; and justice and mercy and holiness are the genuine fruit of it. For God hath set eternal barriers between this sort of good and evil. The fountains of everlasting salvation cannot be liable to the inconsistency mentioned by St. James, of sending out *at the same place both sweet waters and bitter*^c. No; where the spring is pure, the streams will be clear and fresh: but where that is polluted, all that issues from it can be no better than *mares of death and overflowings of ungodliness*.

2. As unreasonable it is, secondly, to suppose that they who are principally concerned to promote moral good and evil in the world should choose means so incongruous for effecting it, as might render the inferences uncertain, by which we conclude the nature of the tree or doctrine from the fruits or consequences justly charged upon and manifestly resulting from it. For here our Saviour's maxim will take place, that *a house so divided against itself could not stand*. And yet to suppose the distinction before us false, is plainly to divide God and Satan each against himself. Put case, the *fruit be good* and the *tree corrupt*; this makes Satan to promote piety and virtue: imagine the *tree good* and the *fruit corrupt*, and this makes God to promote wickedness and error; than which there cannot be a greater contradiction to each of their natures, interests, and designs.

God is a God of truth and goodness. These he loves, encourages, and advances; and for that purpose makes use of means that are

^b Rom. xvi. 18; Matt. vii. 22, 23.

^c James iii. 11.

good and true, and naturally fitted to bring about those ends. But it cannot be for the honour of virtue to have men cheated into it by methods of falsehood and trick; nor does it suit with the wisdom of our great Guide and Governor to lead men by wrong and dangerous paths, rather than by a direct way, that is plain and easy and safe. What need then can there be of false prophets and false doctrines when the true will instruct men so much better? And to apprehend that he intends to lead them into error and impiety is to make him cease to be God, and to do the devil's drudgery. Since then God cannot design to lead men into evil and destruction, nor choose false doctrines for bringing them to the knowledge of the truth; it follows, that such doctrines cannot be used by or supposed to come from God at all.

As absurd would it be to think the devil instrumental in the advancement of piety and virtue; which yet are certainly advanced so oft as true principles are instilled into us. His character is a *liar*, and the father of it; and can such a one favour and propagate truth? He is a *murderer from the beginning*^d; and can a spirit whose essence is envy and malice scatter exhortations to justice and order and charity and peace and meekness and mutual love? He is a *slanderer*; and can it consist with such a disposition to discountenance and condemn all railing and reviling and censoriousness and detraction? Judge therefore with yourselves, whether such *fruits* as these do not sufficiently distinguish their *trees*; whether every one who thus preaches Christ be not of God; whether the spirits that encourage the contrary be not of that wicked one. Whether therefore it be not of the last consequence to *try*, and not rashly to *believe every spirit*^e: since some, how smoothly or how zealously soever they may carry the matter, are yet such as fall under St. Paul's censure, of *serving, not the Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly*^f. Deceit is the business of their trade, and gain the bottom of all their boasted godliness.

So very great reason have we to attend with all diligence to our Saviour's caution here, to study the holy Scriptures; which will, which alone can, enable us rightly to judge of the prophets, whether they be real sheep, or wolves in sheep's clothing. And in especial manner to pray God that he would *put away from us* false teachers, those worst of all *hurtful* things; and *give us* virtuous and true teachers, who deserve so highly to be reckoned among the principal of those things that be *profitable for us, through Jesus Christ our Lord*^g.

THE NINTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY.

THE COLLECT.

GRANT to us, Lord, we beseech thee, the spirit to think and do always such things as be rightful; that we, who cannot do

^d John viii. 44.

^e 1 John iv. 1.

^f Rom. xvi. 18.

^g Collect.

any thing that is good without thee, may by thee be enabled to live according to thy will ; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

THE EPISTLE. 1 Cor. x. 1.

1 Moreover, brethren, I would not that ye should be ignorant, how that all our fathers were under the cloud, and all passed through the sea ; Israelites heretofore. They were conducted out of Egypt under the protection of a bright cloud, denoting God's presence of favour with them ; they passed through the Red sea, miraculously dried up to give them way.

2 And were all baptized unto Moses in the cloud and in the sea ; through the sea, as they resembled the baptism (the being put under and rising out of water), so did they answer the same end too. For upon this miraculous deliverance they entered into covenant with and professed their faith in God.

3 And did all eat the same spiritual meat ; 3, 4. They also were fed with manna, and drank of water out of the rock ; which were not a bodily sustenance only, but of a sacramental nature, and types of Christ. (See John vi.)

4 And did all drink the same spiritual drink : for they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them : and that rock was Christ. 5. And yet when these men so highly favoured grew disobedient, their singular privileges notwithstanding, they were destroyed, and never arrived at the promised land.

6 Now these things were our examples, to the intent we should not lust after evil things, as they also lusted. 6. Which is a warning to us to avoid their crimes, lest otherwise we be like them in their punishments. See Numb. xi.

7 Neither be ye idolaters, as were some of them ; as it is written, The people sat down to eat and drink, and rose up to play. 7. See Exod. xxxii.

8 Neither let us commit fornication, as some of them committed, and fell in one day three and twenty thousand. 8. See Numb. xxv.

9 Neither let us tempt Christ, as some of them also tempted, and were destroyed of serpents. 9. See Numb. xxi.

10 Neither murmur ye, as some of them also murmured, and were destroyed of the destroyer. 10. See Numb. xiv. 2-37.

11 Now all these things happened unto 11. These dealings with

them for ensamples: and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come. God's church heretofore are images and types of his dealing with the Christian under this last dispensation, the gospel; and check all those presumptions too commonly entertained upon the external privileges of religion.

12 *Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall.* 12. And therefore let none build so much upon these, as to imagine it impossible for him to perish, because he is one of God's peculiar and covenanted people.

13 *There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may able to bear it.* 13. And if fear of suffering shake your good resolutions, consider, that as hitherto you have not been reduced to any great extremities, so neither will God at any time lay this burden so heavy, as that they who faithfully do their part shall have reason to complain that he hath been wanting in his. For such shall always find assistances of Divine grace sufficient to support them under the sharpest afflictions.

COMMENT.

THE chapter next before had concluded with very pressing exhortations to diligence and zeal in our Christian course; enforced by the apostle's own example, who in his own case found this necessary, to prevent his being *at last a castaway*. But because some might think there was no cause for such melancholy apprehensions, after the signal mercies and advantages, of which the gospel covenant had not only given them possession, but had encouraged them to look upon the present as certain pledges of more and greater hereafter; to prevent any false and dangerous confidences of this kind, the next thing he attempts is to prove that all such hopes include a condition of obedience; without which even the most glorious privileges cannot avail for averting the wrath of God. In evidence of this assertion, he sets before them the state of the Jewish church; he shews how highly they were favoured, and yet how unhappily they miscarried, in the wilderness. And from thence he draws an inference, that the Christian church hath reason to expect the like dealing, if they shall render themselves obnoxious to it by the like ingratitude and disingenuous provocations.

This argument seems to turn upon two points, the correspondence between the Jewish and Christian economy, and the reason and justice of the thing.

The correspondence between these two economies is in many respects easy to be gathered from what I had long since occasion to speak upon this subject¹. But it is nowhere more significantly declared than in the passage and upon the account now under consideration.

1. To this purpose it is observable, first, that St. Paul applies to the figure expressions proper to the substance shadowed by it. The

¹ See Epistle, Sunday after Christmas, and fourth Sunday in Lent.

Israelites are called *the fathers*, as ancestors from whom Christians are descended: of the same race and stock in a spiritual sense, and differing in point of priority in time; that is, they and we are one and the same church in the main, though the periods and capacities of it be not in all ages the same. Their deliverance out of Egypt, and the paschal lamb on that occasion, were so lively types of our rescue from a bondage worse than Egyptian by the death of Christ, as to give him the title of *our Passover sacrificed for us*.^k Their miraculous passage through the sea, and safe ascent upon the shore, while walking under the covering of a dewy cloud, by which God declared himself in peculiar manner present; and their belief and obedience professed at that time, by receiving the commands and putting themselves under the conduct of Moses, are here emphatically styled in the Christian-dialect, being *baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea*^h. The manna, by which they were sustained in the wilderness, we have our blessed Lord's authority for applying to himself, *the true bread which came down from heaven*ⁱ. And the rock pierced to furnish water for their thirst, St. Paul expressly calls a representation of Christ. And farther, to insinuate this alliance and relation, he calls the one *spiritual meat* and the other *spiritual drink*^k; to intimate that they were in the quality of sacraments to the church then in being, and figures of that other Christian sacrament which is the food of souls, the bread, by which we spiritually eat Christ's body, and the cup, in which we spiritually drink of this true Rock, out of whose side, when pierced, came forthwith blood and water. Such is the agreement between the Jewish and Christian dispensation; but with this difference to our advantage, that the privileges, which to them were shadows and prefigurations of better things to come, we now enjoy in their reality and utmost perfection. A real efficacy and use there was indeed in the sacraments of the old law, such as suited the condition and capacity of the church at that time; such as signified their engagements to duty on one hand, and the grace and favour of God on the other. But those things were so darkly and feebly represented then, in comparison of the present and more plenteous manifestations, both on God's and our part, in the Christian economy now, that St. Paul here allows them no better a title than that of *τύποι*, rough draughts or sketches of that finished piece, which was intended to come after, and to be the last and best that a state of mortality and trial should ever be blest with or capable of.

From this resemblance, in which it is our glory to excel, the apostle descends to another, which we must make it our constant care to avoid—that of the crimes; because a certain consequence of them will be the punishments, for which those Israelites were infamous. Of these it may not be amiss to remark somewhat briefly, for the more effectual awakening our dread and detestation of some sins, which seem much more nearly allied to those recounted here than the generality of Christians surely apprehend them to be.

The provocations given by those Israelites are very great and amazing, especially when those signal favours they enjoyed are taken into

^h 1 Cor. v. 7.^k 1 Cor. x. 2.ⁱ John vi. 51.^k 1 Cor. x. 3, 4.

the account, for which such offences were most unworthy returns. Six hundred thousand persons and upwards subsisting upon a daily miracle, and by a sort of food which without any labour or expense of theirs fell round about their camp, and is observed to have had the advantage of accommodating itself to every man's appetite¹, did not content them^m, but they required flesh to gratify their luxury. The stay of Moses detained in the mount soon wearied out their patience, and though few months had passed since they in most solemn and awful manner received an express prohibition to worship the invisible God under any bodily representationⁿ, their blind preposterous zeal formed to themselves a beast, and sacrificed to this absurd image of their mighty deliverer^o. The allurements of idolatrous women prevailed upon their lust, and easily seduced them, first to forbidden and polluted pleasures, and then to communicating in the adoration of false gods. The want of water, though formerly supplied by miracle, inflamed them into rage and rebellion^p. Nor was their own experience made use of to quiet their distrusts, or silence the unthankful and loud complaints against that Providence whose bounty was never more eminently signalized than in the provision lately made for the sustenance and relief of those insensible desponding malecontents. Once more^q, the report made of the promised land by the messengers sent to view it was so distant from truth, the fears and sloth of the greater part of the reporters so mixed with fact, and the ill impressions those incendiaries made so greedily received, so obstinately retained, (notwithstanding the testimony of two princes of their tribes, in the number of the sent, the many descriptions God himself had given to the contrary, and his frequent promises to fix them in that possession,) that neither the truth nor his power had now any credit with them; but in despair of a country believed impregnable, and in scorn of a conquest not worth the cost in case it should be reduced, they look upon themselves as given up for a prey, form a general mutiny, reproach God and their governors with the difficulties of the attempt, and the discomforts of their present sojourning in the wilderness, renounce the conduct they had hitherto been under, declare for a new captain of their own choice, and prefer even a return into Egypt before any farther progress toward Canaan.

The mention of these provocations, and of the dreadful judgments consequent upon them, were in particular manner seasonable to the church of Corinth: among whom St. Paul's two Epistles sufficiently discover several abuses and errors of great affinity with the crimes of those Israelites. 'Profane contempt and public dishonour to the body and blood of Christ in the sacrament of the Lord's supper: of which true bread from heaven, thus disdainfully used, the manna treated of old with so much contumely was in that respect also a type'. The scandalous liberties of partaking in idol-feasts and temples were an approach to the Israelites' eating and drinking before their molten calf. The indulgence given to lust and sensuality appears not only

¹ Wisd. xvi. 21.

^m 1 Cor. x. 6. Numbers xi.

ⁿ 1 Cor. x. 7. Exod. xxxii.

^o 1 Cor. x. 8. Numbers xiv. ^p 1 Cor. x. 9. Numbers xxi.

^q 1 Cor. x. 10. Numbers xiv.

^r 1 Cor. xi.

^s 1 Cor. viii. 10.

from the care taken to insist on these vices, and the danger of them at large¹; but especially from a crime so flagitious and unnatural as open incest *with a father's wife*² being connived at, to the insupportable scandal of Christian discipline and religion. And lastly, for the murmurers of old, who grew weary of God's methods in the wilderness, despaired of Canaan, and, in discontent at the hardships they felt or formed to themselves, were for returning back to Egypt; these met but too near a parallel at Corinth, in many whom dread of persecution and trials affrighted from their duty, but in none so much as in them whose staggering in the faith rendered St. Paul's discourse necessary in proof of Christ's resurrection and our own³: which they who cease to believe, plainly give up that promised inheritance of which Canaan was a figure, do by necessary implication make God and Christ a liar, revolt from him, and in a spiritual sense return back to Egypt.

So apposite were the instances of disobedience here to the circumstances of the Corinthian converts at that time. By which remark we should flatter ourselves too much, did we conclude that they are not also admonitions and examples highly seasonable to the Christians of this or any other place and time. The parallel is but too easy to be drawn, while there are, even among the professors of this religion, so many bold contemners of its mysteries; so many hypocritical and unworthy receivers of its sacraments; so many indulgers of those sensual lusts which every baptized believer hath solemnly renounced; so many murmurers against the dispensations of Providence; so many hearts entirely set upon the present world and its advantages; so little belief in, or desire of, or influence from, the endless and unconceivable bliss of a life to come, as their true happiness, and that which ought to be the ultimate aim of their actions, the sum of their hopes and wishes, and the support of those labours and afflictions by which their obedience is tried in this state of discipline. They who are faulty in these instances, though their crimes be not in point of fact the same, do yet discover themselves to have the same spirit of perverseness and unbelief and discontent with the Israelites of old: they in effect do scorn the promised land, and in their hearts turn back again to Egypt, while God, by methods suitable to his own wisdom, is exercising their patience, and leading them to his rest through the wilderness of this world. And therefore every such Christian may see his own danger in the events that befell the persons after the example of whose sins he copies: which leads me to consider the last article of the parallel, consisting in the punishments of these Israelites as we find them recorded in the sacred story.

In the first instance mentioned by St. Paul, God gave the lusts flesh according to their desire⁴, but withal such a nauseating and indigestion, that great numbers are said to have died, not only by a fire from the Lord, but a pestilence (as some) or (as others have thought) violent vomitings; insomuch that a famous station in the wilderness received two names as monuments to all posterity, intimating the vengeance God executed, and the multitudes perishing in it, upon this occasion. In the second instance, the tribe of Levi, consecrated to

¹ 1 Cor. v. vi. vii.² 1 Cor. v. 1.³ 1 Cor. xv.⁴ Numbers xi.

the service of the Lord, received commission to make three thousand examples for their desertion and apostasy, by slaying so many who had sacrificed to the molten calf. In the third, the apostle mentions the terrible effect of a plague, which swept off in one day three and twenty thousand²; besides those whom God slew, not by his own immediate hand, but by judges and officers commanded to be ministers of his justice upon the offenders. In the fourth, the history is express, that *much people died* of the venomous bitings of the serpents³: and at the last God was so highly incensed, as not only to cut off many of those murmurers upon the spot, but unalterably to decree that two only of that numerous body should attain the land of promise, while the carcasses of the rest were left to perish in the wilderness⁴.

Thus far the history of Moses leads us to examples of God's severity, even upon his chosen and covenanted people; and shews that Christians cannot, by being such, promise themselves exemption from the like judgments, if they shall by the like disobedience render themselves obnoxious to his angry justice. But the inference which in the infancy of the Christian church St. Paul could ground upon parity of reason, and in comparison with the Jews only, we in these latter ages may strengthen from matter of fact, and events that have already befallen this Christian church itself. The parts of it once most conspicuous and flourishing for soundness of faith and piety of life have long since been overrun with Turcism and barbarity; the light of the gospel is taken away from them, and they are once more given up to the blackest darkness of sin and infidelity. Nor is the case thus with whole nations only, who have been abandoned by God after having first abandoned themselves to wickedness; but where the truth is still professed, with private persons also, whose punishments resemble those of the Israelites where their transgressions have done so. For how often does the wisdom of Providence exert itself in undoing men by their own foolish choice! How common a thing is it for the sensual and the worldly to have his inordinate desires gratified to his manifest detriment, and those honours or riches or pleasures, which he sought as the most desirable blessings of life, made his curse and his ruin! How frequently do discontent and distrust, weariness and impatience, delay or utterly put by those good, and hasten or occasion those evil things, which by waiting the leisure and submitting to the methods of the great Governor of the world would be ordered infinitely more to our advantage! But especially, (which is the punishment common to all the instances of disobedience recited in this scripture, and which indeed is the heaviest of them all,) how certain are the vicious dispositions and practices contrary to our vows and our duty to bring us under that common fate of the rebellious Israelites, of being excluded the land of promise; and so, whatever be our portion in the wilderness of this world, to cut off all access to our heavenly Canaan!

In one word, no covenant can be more solemn and express than that between God and his ancient people; no promises on his, no engagements on man's part more firm: the marks and miraculous appearances of his presence and favour were then as evident and as

¹ Exod. xxxij.² Numbers xiv.³ Numbers xxi. 6.⁴ Numbers xiv.

glorious, their privileges and deliverances were as distinguishing and valuable, as the condition of that church could admit. Yet all this notwithstanding, when they so foully violated their part, they did at the same time release God of his; they therefore, from the most signal monuments of the divine goodness and mercy, becoming by their own perverseness the most stupendous monuments of wrath and vengeance, furnish us with abundant ground for that inference at the twelfth verse, *Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall.*

2. Having spoken so largely to the apostle's argument, which turns upon the correspondence between the Jewish and Christian economy, it shall suffice to say something very briefly to the general point, wherein both are concerned—the reason and justice of such punishments.

The guilt of any crime is to be measured, not by the quality of the fact alone, but by the several aggravations attending it: so that the same thing done by persons under different circumstances is very far from involving each of them in the same degree of guilt. And, not now to descend to the particular consideration of such circumstances, it is evident the more of knowledge and wilfulness and ingratitude appears in the offender, the more heinous is the crime, and the heavier condemnation he is to expect. Now the law given to the Israelites, and the manner of giving it in mount Sinai; the voluntary engagements and frequent declarations of obedience to it, which themselves had made; the astonishing evidences of God's presence and protection, and the miraculous effects of his bounty, under which they daily lived, added to the cruelty of that bondage out of which they had been delivered, and the glorious miracles attending that deliverance before their arrival in the wilderness; these all concur to render all revolt from and distrust of such a God wicked and disingenuous to the last degree; especially when the matter of that distrust was either real necessities formerly supplied, or imaginary necessities only, or a despair of attaining such benefits as his truth had been pledged for, and as could not be obstructed by greater difficulties than they had already seen surmounted by past interpositions of his power on their behalf. Upon all these accounts the advantages of their condition were so many aggravations of their crime, and the more high their favour with God had been, the more provoking and unpardonable were the unworthy returns made for it. The maxim mentioned by our Saviour being of self-evident and eternal equity in cases of this nature: *Unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required: and to whom men have committed much, of him they will ask the more.*

And this is the consideration which brings the matter home to our own case. For I hope there is no need of taking pains to prove that the advantages of the Christian are in every respect far superior to any that the Jewish church could ever boast of. The bondage of sin and corruption, and the miseries of that servitude, are infinitely more to be dreaded and detested than all the tyrannical cruelties of an in-

human Pharaoh and his merciless taskmasters. The rescue from them incomparably more glorious and valuable. The defeat of that barbarous prince and his armies, and their destruction at the Red sea, a blessing far beneath that overthrow given to sin and death and Satan by the blood of Christ. The manna and water out of the rock, though highly beneficial and miraculous, yet a poor sustenance when compared with *the true bread which came down from heaven^d, the flesh which is meat indeed, and the blood which is drink indeed; the wine of elect souls, and the water, of which whosoever drinketh shall never thirst, but it shall be in him a well springing up into everlasting life^e*. And even that glory of the Lord which in a bright cloud at once conducted and protected the Israelitish armies, and delivered his orders and oracles from a tabernacle filled with the majesty of the divine presence, had no glory in comparison of that more excellent glory of the *Godhead, whose entire fulness dwelt in Jesus Christ bodily^f*, pitched his tabernacle in human flesh, and in the most free and familiar manner taught and conversed with men, that he might lead them through this desert of a world to a region of rest and bliss. A region but poorly represented by an earthly Canaan flowing with milk and honey; for in this is the perfection of joy, and rivers of pleasure at God's right hand for evermore. Thus are our deliverances greater and more complete, our privileges in present more noble and substantial, and our prospects in futurity infinitely more inviting and blissful, than any people or dispensation besides were ever blessed withal.

And what should be the consequence of these preeminences but a deeper sense of gratitude, and in that sense a more punctual and cheerful and steady obedience to our merciful Benefactor and Redeemer? Or, if this be not the consequence, must it not be that the heinousness of our guilt, by behaving ourselves wickedly and unworthily, will certainly rise in proportion to the blessings we slight and abuse? If God spared not the unthankful wretches who received less, can it in reason be expected that he should spare us whom he hath obliged to serve him by bestowing so much more? We have seen the never-to-be-forgotten instances of his *goodness and severity; to them who perished in the wilderness severity; but to us goodness, exceeding abundant goodness, provided we continue in his goodness, otherwise we also ourselves shall assuredly be cut off^g*. Nay, we shall be made examples of vengeance more inexorable, more insupportable, if not made wiser by these examples: because, in respect of this admonition also, our advantages have exceeded, and every degree of that excess is a fresh aggravation of our disingenuity, and adds to the obstinacy of our sin. Let us then labour to understand, that we may rightly value and be thankful for the benefits of the Christian religion. But let us remember that this value and those thanks cannot be otherwise effectually expressed than by a life of obedience worthy the greatness of those benefits: and that, as we have been the most eminently favoured, so it becomes and highly concerns us to be the best and most exemplary of men. Let us use and enjoy our privileges with delight, but let us use them with fear too; praising God for them,

^d John vi.^e John iv. 14.^f Coloss. ii. 9.^g Rom. xii. 22.

but not presuming upon them. Let us not soothe ourselves with fond imaginations, that the truth and honour of God are concerned to complete the happiness of those for whom he hath done so great things already. Alas! we know, that of six hundred thousand who came triumphant out of Egypt, two only attained to the promised land^b. He then reserved that blessing for a new and better generation, and, we are told, that he is able to confound the vain presumption of them who say with themselves, *We have Abraham to our father, by even out of stones raising up children to Abraham*ⁱ. God will not, cannot suffer his truth to fail, nor his honour to receive any blemish; but neither the one nor the other of these are any comfort or security to us, farther than we are faithful in the discharge of those conditions to which the promises are made; and the glory of God is magnified, not in the number, but in the quality and goodness of them who are partakers (because made meet to be partakers) of the inheritance of the saints in light^k.

In a word, as our privileges and mercies, the spiritual more especially, will make a very considerable article in the last great account; so will the improvement or the abuse of these carry a great stroke in the measure of every man's reward or punishment. The Christian, for this reason, can expect no medium between the most exquisite misery and the most consummate happiness. O that we would therefore consider the sad reverse which the day of God will make in multitudes who now are signally favoured, but shall then be as signally tormented; who now with disdain or with pity look upon the darkness and superstition of poor benighted pagans, whose *fewer stripes* for not doing that *Master's will they knew not*^l, those who knew but did it not shall then have cause to envy! O that we would frequently recollect and seriously lay to heart that judgment denounced by our blessed Lord, when he upbraids the cities where his miracles had wrought no effect—*Woe unto thee, Chorazin! woe unto thee, Bethsaida! for if the mighty works, which were done in you, had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. But I say unto you, It shall be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon at the day of judgment, than for you. And thou, Capernaum, which art exalted unto heaven, shalt be brought down to hell: for if the mighty works, which have been done in thee, had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until this day. But I say unto you, That it shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom in the day of judgment, than for thee.* The words are exceeding apposite to my present purpose; the application natural and easy, fit and profitable to be made by every particular church and every particular Christian. For there we have our Lord's own authority, declaring by what measures he intends to proceed; and consequently a fresh and very awakening enforcement to that exhortation of St. Paul before us, which God grant every Christian grace to practise, by considering upon how advantageous ground he standeth, and in proportion to the height of God's favour and mercy to him *taking the greater heed lest he fall.*

^b Numbers xiv.ⁱ Matt. iii.^k Coloss. i. 12.^l Luke xii. 47, 48.^m Matt. xi. 21—24.

THE NINTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY.

THE GOSPEL. St. Luke xvi. 1.

1 *And he said unto his disciples, There was a certain rich man, which had a steward; and the same was accused unto him that he had wasted his goods.*

1. Jesus thought fit to excite his hearers to care and diligence in the use and improvement of the good things

God intrusts them with, by the following parable.

2 *And he called him, and said unto him, How is it that I hear this of thee? give an account of thy stewardship; for thou mayest be no longer steward.*

3 *Then the steward said within himself, What shall I do? for my lord taketh away from me the stewardship: I cannot dig; to beg I am ashamed.*

3. The steward, upon this warning, began to cast about which way he should subsist when the profits of his service were gone: he considered that hard labour was a thing he could not buckle to: and that begging was a scandalous course to get his bread by.

4 *I am resolved what to do, that, when I am put out of the stewardship, they may receive me into their houses.*

4. At last he contrived to ingratiate himself with the tenants, that they might find their account in giving him entertainment, as a return for past obligations.

5 *So he called every one of his lord's debtors unto him, and said unto the first, How much owest thou unto my lord?*

6 *And he said, An hundred measures of oil. And he said unto him, Take thy bill, and sit down quickly, and write fifty.*

7 *Then said he to another, And how much owest thou? And he said, An hundred measures of wheat. And he said unto him, Take thy bill, and write fourscore.*

8 *And the lord commended the unjust steward, because he had done wisely: for the children of this world are in their generation wiser than the children of light.*

8. The very lord, at whose expense this fraudulent project took effect, could not but acknowledge the wisdom of the projector. And indeed the men of the world are abundantly more shrewd in the business of it, than even good men are in the management of their great and eternal concern.

9 *And I say unto you, Make to yourselves friends of the mammon of unrighteousness; that, when ye fail, they may receive you into everlasting habitations.*

9. This steward's wisdom therefore I would have you imitate, in so managing the perishing possessions of this world, as may secure you a future subsistence when that trust shall determine.

10 *And I say unto you, Who is able to keep that which he hath committed to him, shall receive more, and will be promoted; but he that is able to lose that which he hath committed to him, shall receive less, and will be promoted.*

10. The same rule which governs the steward's conduct, governs the conduct of all men. He who is able to keep that which he hath committed to him, shall receive more, and will be promoted; but he that is able to lose that which he hath committed to him, shall receive less, and will be promoted.

11 *And I say unto you, Whosoever will be the head of the church, must first be the servant of all.*

11. The same rule which governs the steward's conduct, governs the conduct of all men. He who is able to keep that which he hath committed to him, shall receive more, and will be promoted; but he that is able to lose that which he hath committed to him, shall receive less, and will be promoted.

COMMENT.

THE parable, now offering itself to our consideration, sets before us a steward about to be dismissed from that gainful office for his improvident behaviour in it. This melancholy prospect puts him upon contriving to secure himself a future maintenance at his master's cost. The method chosen for this purpose was to deal secretly with his lord's debtors; and, by making false but favourable entries into their books of account, to engage their kindness when he should stand most in need of it, as a grateful return for the sums thus remitted to them. In this practice indeed there was great dishonesty, for which reason our Saviour calls him an *unjust steward*;* but that part of his character, not falling within the compass of our Lord's design in propounding this parable, is passed over without farther notice taken of it. Meanwhile his silence in that point can by no means be construed approbation; but an instruction rather, that in the interpretation of parables we are to content ourselves with drawing such consequences from thence as their substance and main intent naturally lead us to, without insisting too nicely upon circumstances which are incidental only, and beside the purpose properly to be served by them. Now that in the case before us is manifestly to provoke our imitation of this man's wit and forecast, who so dexterously laid this scheme for subsisting hereafter; by the management of a trust, which, although a present support, yet he perceived was not likely long to continue so. And his great providence and application, so agreeable to that earnestness of thought and care which sticks at nothing to secure the so uncertain advantages of this world, is insinuated as a just reproach to the inconsideration and remissness, which even they who make it their principle and profession to secure the everlasting advantages of another world are observed to be guilty of in the management of that affair.

The particulars suggested in this parable, for awakening our diligence in this great concern of our souls and a future state, are principally three:

I. The capacity of the person, *a steward to a certain rich man*, verse 1.

II. The consideration which put him upon providing for himself, intimated in those words, *Give an account of thy stewardship, for thou mayest be no longer steward*, verse 2.

III. The method taken for securing his future subsistence; described at large in the five following verses, and very significantly expressed by our Lord at the ninth verse, where we find it termed, *making friends of the mammon of unrighteousness*.

I. The first argument is taken from the quality of the person whose behaviour makes the subject of this parable—a *steward to a certain rich man*. That God should be represented under the character of a *rich man* must needs be very natural and proper, because *the whole world is his, and all that is therein*†. And when we are styled *stewards*

to that rich man, there are two things plainly intended by it; first, that whatever portion of the things of this world we have in possession, that is not strictly our own; and secondly, that it is committed to us in the nature of a trust.

1. First, the quality of a *steward* implies that the goods we have at present in our hands are not strictly and truly our own; upon which account it is that we find the accusation in the first verse runs, for wasting that which was his master's. And a remark it is, very necessary to be often awakened in our thoughts, that all we enjoy here below is only lent and permitted to our use, but that still the property can rest nowhere else except in the great Lord to whose service and family we belong. We are the tillers of his ground, and are allowed to eat and to rejoice in the fruits of our labour. He gives us leave to take, not only the necessaries, but the comforts and conveniences of life; he accepts and very well approves of a prudent care for our families; and is not displeased with our estimating the competency of such provision according to that rank and quality in the world to which his providence hath appointed us. But all this while that providence hath not appointed you, nor me, nor any man, owners and proprietors in the case. Those accommodations which to-day are ours will quickly be another's and another's. The product of the soil belongs in some sort to us, but the soil itself belongs to none of us. And when we have taken the utmost care imaginable that our families may continue, and our dwellingplaces endure from one generation to another, yet will there be perpetual shifting of hands, and a succession of faces, into those houses and lands which we have vainly called after our own names. So that the longest inheritance and descent is in truth but the longest use, but not so much as a lease or tenant-right. For, after all our boast of settlements and estates, nothing is or can be settled, but the fee and original right in the great universal Lord. And if this can be fixed in him alone, then it is evident that all our possessions are falsely called ours. They are so far from being ours as proprietors, that we have no certain term in them, but are removable at the will of the Lord. Nay even the fruits or product, which we have somewhat more of interest in, are not so much ours neither as that we may dispose of them at pleasure. For I observed the character of a steward to imply, not only that the goods in his hands are none of his own, but likewise,

2. Secondly, that they are committed to him in the nature of a trust. *It is required in stewards that a man be found faithful*, says St. Paul; the office plainly speaks a confidence reposed in them; a confidence for which they are accountable; and the parable now before us declares that an account shall certainly be taken; and those be charged with and punished for their unfaithfulness, who have committed waste, and squandered away their Lord's goods unprofitably. This consideration seems to meet with that fundamental error, by which men keep themselves in countenance for the many miscarriages of this kind. Is it not *lawful for me to do what I will with my own*? we find to be a plea very frequent in the thoughts at least of thou-

sands, who believe their duty satisfied in this regard, when they neither get their wealth by dishonest practices, nor spend it to the prejudice of their family or their creditors. But alas! it should be remembered that this plea cannot fit any of our mouths; and that the person introduced by our Saviour as speaking it is the master and owner of the vineyard*. Him those words well become in their true and most literal sense; but they take too much to themselves who presume to use them, and are but labourers and servants in that vineyard. These therefore must be governed by their Lord in the management of the fruits; for those fruits are not honestly disposed of when either suffered to lie by without any use at all, or converted to ill uses, or not employed to such good ones as he hath expressly directed, and declares it his will and pleasure that they should be expended upon.

It must therefore import us very highly to understand aright what those goods of our Master be, whereof he hath given us the trust, and expects to receive an account. Those specified in the parable are plainly that *mammon of unrighteousness*, which is so called, partly because it is frequently gotten by injustice and deceit, and partly because as many as depend and set their hearts upon it, this at the last most certainly will deceive. Hence in the following verses^a we find it opposed to *the true riches*, and termed *another's*, to distinguish it from the wealth that is truly *our own*. A plentiful fortune then is the trust intimated here, and the design of our Lord is to make men sensible that they are not at liberty to use this just as they please; but bound to consider it as still their *Master's goods*, the wasting whereof is an instance of great unfaithfulness, and will be punished as such.

But though wealth be the goods to which the parable is chiefly determined, yet we are not by any means to imagine that rich men only stand in the capacity of stewards, and that the use of such possessions shall be the only article of our account; for every advantage of nature or of grace, as well as those of fortune; our life, our health, our strength, our wit and parts, our knowledge natural and acquired; our time, our leisure, our every ability, our every opportunity, our every inclination to do well; every dispensation of Providence, whether it be a change to honour or dishonour, to abundance or to poverty, to ease or to suffering; our very afflictions and temptations; all are our Master's goods, all are intrusted with us, all are capable to be made profit of; all will at last be brought to our account. And therefore every man ought to esteem himself a steward; for though all have not the same trust, yet all have some trust: a trust, in which the greater circumspection and diligence is necessary, because it cannot continue always; and because so much depends upon the wise management of it for the time it does continue. To which purpose I take notice, in the

II. Second place, what consideration it was that put this steward upon such vigorous endeavours to provide for himself. Of this the second and third verses are full; and the true import of them seems to be, not only that this trust of ours must determine at the pleasure

* Matt. xx. 15.

^a Luke xvi. 11, 12.

of our Master, not only that at some time it certainly will determine, but that the loss of it is a punishment upon us. All which is comprehended in that passage, *How is it that I hear this of thee? Give an account of thy stewardship, for thou mayest be no longer steward, &c.*

That our possessions of every kind lie at the mercy of our almighty Master, that they must determine whensocver he sees fit, and that it is his will they should ere long determine, are things so manifest, even from experience and common sense, that I cannot think there is occasion to argue upon so clear a point. Let men but recollect the surprising events and mighty changes in families and their fortunes which fall within the compass of their own knowledge; and even this narrow view will sufficiently demonstrate the instability of our present enjoyments, and the vanity of esteeming any thing in strict speaking our own. Now these, whether they come upon us by natural causes or by unusual disasters; whether men and their wickedness be the next instruments of them to us, or whether they be more immediately the handywork of God; be they the innumerable chances of life, or the almost as numberless variety of deaths; yet they must be granted to be every way in reality so many different methods of taking away our stewardship from us, or us from it. Herein they all agree, as being instances of his justice and sovereignty. His, whose all things are; who ordains or permits these measures for *distributing to every man severally as he will*; whose right is so absolute, and his property so entire, that he can do no wrong, however he think fit to *put down one and to set up another*¹.

But the Scriptures, when they mention God's proceedings of this nature, observe, that he acts in the quality, not of a lord and proprietor only, but in that of a judge too. Which brings us to the last clause of this consideration, that, generally speaking, the loss of our stewardship is a punishment upon us. Thus riches are given to try men and their dispositions, and to make them cheerful and thankful instruments of good to others, from the feeling and imitation of the divine bounty to themselves. But when such opportunities are neglected, and such abilities abused, God often transfers them into a more worthy hand, and does, in this respect also, *let out his vineyard unto other husbandmen, who will render him the fruits in their seasons*². Thus Solomon observes³, *A good man leaveth an inheritance to his children's children: and the wealth of the wicked is laid up for the just*. And Job much to the same effect⁴: *This is the portion of a wicked man with God, and the heritage of oppressors, which they shall receive of the Almighty. Though he heap up silver as the dust, and prepare raiment as the clay; he may prepare it, but the just shall put it on, and the innocent shall divide the silver*.

Thus does God likewise frequently proceed with regard to those other goods of nature and of grace committed to our trust. It is for the abuse of natural reason that St. Paul tells us⁵ God gave the heathens *up to vile affections and a reprobate mind*. It is of grace that our Lord denounces that threatening⁶, *From him that hath not, that*

¹ Psalm lxxv. 7.² Matt. xxi. 41.³ Prov. xiii. 22.⁴ Job xxvii. 13, 16, 17.⁵ Rom. i. 26, 28.⁶ Luke viii. 18.

makes not a right use of what he hath, *shall be taken away even that which he seemeth to have*. And once more it is thus that, as the Epistle for this day acquaints us, God dealt with the Israelites in the wilderness, upon whom so many miracles and such noble privileges had been thrown away without any suitable effects. Now these things sometimes done prove that our advantages of every kind are trusts for which the receivers stand accountable. But in regard, as was observed before, every man, in what condition or capacity soever, is still a steward, these changes may be interpreted not so properly a revocation, as an altering the nature and quality of our trust. And therefore one way more there remains common to all alike, which is an effectual taking away our stewardship: for death will be sure one day to displace us. Death, like the rest, is a punishment for sin: death too leads us, when thus put out, to a reckoning from which none can be exempted. A reckoning which he, who is himself our Master and our Judge, hath peremptorily declared will turn upon the manner of his servants' management of the talents delivered out to be trafficked with for their Lord's use^b. And they who have not discharged their consciences upon this article shall be looked upon as betrayers of their trust, cast out of their Lord's favour for embezzling his goods, and doomed to everlasting punishment for their base ingratitude and perfidious injustice. So highly does it concern every man to attend and to copy after the wisdom of this steward, in securing to himself a future subsistence, when his office and the profits of it should be at an end.

III. This is the third head I propounded; and the method chosen for it is described at large from the third to the eighth verse, and at the ninth very significantly expressed by *making friends of the mammon of unrighteousness*.

This steward was sensible that his life was not like to end with his place; and therefore, if that would maintain him no longer, some other course must be found that would. Our case in this respect is the same with his. Death leaves us nothing farther to manage, but death itself does not make an utter end of us. There is a future and eternal state to which we are reserved, which it is our greatest prudence always to have our eye upon, to direct our aims thither, and to make all we have and all we do at present turn to account for our comfortable being there.

How this is to be done the Scriptures abundantly inform us. From hence we learn that the knowledge of our Master's will is the most indispensable obligation to do it^c; that this is the thing we are principally concerned to know^d, that faith without works is but a dead carcass, and the belief not of Christians, but of devils^e. So that good parts and wit and learning and study are to be employed in promoting virtue and religion and truth, in practices and examples and persuasions proportionable to the measure of these advantages. To spend them in nice and unprofitable speculations is to waste our Master's goods: but to misapply them in the recommendation of profaneness or falsehood or irreligion, or any manner of vice, is to turn his own gifts against him. Which whosoever does is threatened with ever-

^b Matt. xxv. Luke xix.

^c Luke xii. 47.

^d Phil. iii. 8.

^e James ii.

lasting torments; whereas they who use them faithfully in his service are promised to *enter into the joy of their Lord*^f; nay, for their wisdom, to *shine as the firmament*; and for turning many to righteousness, as the stars for ever and ever.

Concerning the assistances of grace, how often are we called upon to *work together with God*, to be exceeding careful that *we receive it not in vain*^h, to *minister the gift one to another as good stewards*!ⁱ How often warned of the greatness and the justice of their condemnation who quench it, who resist it, who turn it into lasciviousness!^k how often commanded to employ it to the glory of God, to the advancement of his truth, to the order and peace and edification of his church, to the spiritual benefit of our brethren, and the general good of mankind!^l how solemnly assured, in case we do so, that the same Spirit, who now makes us partakers of the grace, will not fail hereafter to make us partakers of the glory, of Christ!^m

The time will not suffer me to be particular in the uses directed to be made of the several other goods of our Master, which, I took notice under the first head, are committed to our charge. Let it suffice to say in general, that of each of them an account must be rendered; and that this can be done with comfort for none of them which are not diligently managed to the discharge of our own respective duties; the answering those relations and capacities wherein Providence hath placed us; and, in a word, to the becoming useful and beneficial to the world, as we have opportunity and power, to glorify God, and do good to mankind.

But it is fit I should be, because the parable is, express in the case of riches. Which when distributed to others is in this case no wrong, but the very design of that Master whose goods they are. He hath forbidden us to hoap them up unprofitably, and declared that *the rust of them shall be a witness against them that do so*ⁿ. He hath also forbidden them to be used as instruments of *making provision for the flesh to fulfil the lusts thereof*^o. Vanity and pomp, luxury and excess, are all waste; and the wealth thus consumed doth even worse than perish in the using. But the sums expended in works of piety and public good, of charity and compassion, are laid out well and wisely. Those are most truly said to *make us friends*; for they engage the thanks and the prayers of the poor; they attract the favour and love of mankind in general; and, which is best of all, they ensure to us the friendship of God and Christ. Of Him, who interprets our kindness to the least of his brethren as done to himself; and declares, that for feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, and other fit expressions of mercy to the distressed, the righteous shall enter into life eternal^p.

O let us then consider our character, and the account to be given of it; that our stewardship can be but short, and therefore that no time should be lost in getting the best security we can for an habitation that may last for ever. Let us be wise and generous at the same time, by turning that wealth, which is one of our most dangerous temptations, into an occasion of the most profitable virtue. Let us

^f Matt. xrv. ^g Dan. xii. ^h 2 Cor. vi. ⁱ 1 Pet. iv. ^k Heb. x. 29; Jude 14, 15.
^l Rom. xii; 1 Cor. xii. ^m Rom. viii. ⁿ James v. 2. ^o Rom. xiii. 14. ^p Matt. xxv.

adore the wisdom of our gracious Lord, who thus instructs us how to improve the perishing dross of this world, into a crown that *fadeth not away for ever in the heavens*. Let us adore that goodness, which so amply rewards a small return of his own gifts, and *shew mercy with cheerfulness*, since sure to be accepted, when employing his riches to our own true interest. In a word, let us always remember that we are stewards, and manage every gift intrusted with us as men that must give an account. So shall we provide effectually against our dismission from this service; and when we fail, as shortly fail we must, shall be sure to find *friends* ready and glad to *receive us into everlasting habitations*. Which God of his mercy grant for Jesus Christ his sake.

THE TENTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY.

THE COLLECT.

LET thy merciful ears, O Lord, be open to the prayers of thy humble servants; and that they may obtain their petitions make them to ask such things as shall please thee*; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

FOR THE EPISTLE. I Cor. xii. 1.

1 *Concerning spiritual gifts, brethren, I would not have you ignorant.*

and exercise of them, are matters of great concern to be rightly informed about.

2 *Ye know that ye were Gentiles, carried away unto these dumb idols, even as ye were led.*

compared with the idolatry you have left, should give you a very high esteem.

3 *Wherefore I give you to understand, that no man speaking by the Spirit of God calleth Jesus accursed: and that no man can say that Jesus is the Lord, but by the Holy Ghost.*

4 *Now there are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit.*

source. The Spirit of God is the bestower of them.

5 *And there are differences of administrations, but the same Lord.*

all appointed by the same Lord and Christ.

6 *And there are diversities of operations, but it is the same God which worketh all in all.*

1. The gifts of the Holy Spirit, and the proper use

of which the religion you have now embraced, when

3. See Comment.

4. Now these so different gifts flow all from the same

5. The offices that call for the exercise of them are

6. The works performed by them are instances of the power of the same God.

- 7 *But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to every man to profit withal.* 7. And all these powers and the exercise of them are designed for the good of the church in general.
- 8 *For to one is given by the Spirit the word of wisdom; to another the word of knowledge by the same Spirit;* 8. Hence it is, that these gifts are sorted as we see in the distribution, enabling one to understand deep mysteries, another to reveal the meaning of ancient prophecies, &c.
- 9 *To another faith by the same Spirit; to another the gifts of healing by the same Spirit;* 9. Another to be firmly assured, that God will assist him in the most difficult operations for the service of the church: another to cure diseases.
- 10 *To another the working of miracles; to another prophecy; to another discerning of spirits; to another divers kinds of tongues; to another the interpretation of tongues:* 10. Another to exert the Divine power in inflicting vengeance, as St. Peter upon Ananias and Sapphira^b; or in raising from the dead, as he did Tabitha^c: another to foretell future events: another to discern between true and false prophets: another to speak languages he never learnt: another to explain them to the people when spoken by some other.
- 11 *But all these worketh that one and the selfsame Spirit, dividing to every man severally as he will.* 11. Thus does the same Divine Spirit produce all these miraculous powers: but in such measures and kinds, and to such persons, as himself, who is the sole and unrestrained dispenser of them, sees fit and beneficial.

COMMENT.

SUCH is the perverseness of human nature in its present corrupt state, that the helps and advantages afforded for correction and improvement are often turned into occasions of sins to us. Of this the church of Corinth laboured under a famous instance, with regard to the extraordinary gifts and operations of the Holy Spirit. The intent whereof was to establish the truth, to convince unbelievers, to promote the increase and edification and unity of the church of Christ, by such mutual assistances and services as each in his way and measure was qualified to contribute for the benefit of the whole. But these were abused by some to the prejudice of that doctrine they were meant to confirm; by others, to ostentation, vainglory, and private respects, to invidious comparisons between the different kinds of these gifts, and between those who partook of the same kind, to contempt of them who were endued with less, and envying of them who were distinguished by larger measures. These are the abuses which the apostle here sets himself to reform; and the wise method chosen for that purpose is in effect as follows:

First, He puts them in mind of the vanity and superstition of that false religion to which they had formerly yielded a blind obedience. The object of their worship then was senseless and dumb idols; such

^b Acts v.^c Acts ix.

as were falsely pretended to give out their dark oracles, but were in truth altogether incapable either of uttering any themselves, or of dictating any to others. Whereas now they had embraced the doctrine of a God indeed; one, who had not only taught the truth himself, but enabled his servants to reveal and propagate it in a manner so astonishing, and with evidences so uncontestable, as nothing less than immediate inspiration, and powers altogether supernatural, could possibly account for. A religion, which will be the result of consideration and reason; and not, like that forsaken at their conversion, the effect of ignorance and prejudice, and the early imbibed errors of an unhappy education. This I conceive to be the apostle's meaning in those words^d, *Ye know that ye were Gentiles, carried away unto these dumb idols, even as ye were led.*

2. But, in regard the communications of God's Spirit were the distinguishing character of the teachers they ought to follow; his second care is to fortify them against the seducements of some, who boasted that they were, but were not in reality, acted by this Spirit^e. Such were the Jewish exorcists in particular. For detection of whose falsehood he gives one general rule, of use against them and all impostors whatsoever. It is that of observing their doctrines with regard to our blessed Saviour's own person and authority. If any spoke in derogation of him, insinuating that he was a deceiver, and as such to be shunned and abhorred, even supposing that preacher to work wonders, yet were they to be looked upon as lying wonders, and not operations of the Holy Ghost. The reason is, because the Holy Ghost was given on purpose to attest the truth, and win men over to the belief of Jesus and his authority. He cannot therefore be supposed to act in such manifest contradiction to his own design, as the imparting a power of working miracles, in diminution of, nay in direct opposition to, the dignity and doctrine of Jesus, must argue him to do.

On the other hand, if any person made it his business to inculcate the truth as it is in Jesus, taught men to believe, to obey, to serve and submit to him, and entirely to depend upon him for their salvation; whatever miracles should be wrought in confirmation of such a one's authority, these, they might be assured, were wrought by God's own Spirit; and the preacher working them might be safely adhered to. The reason is, because a confirmation of such principles as these was every way agreeable to the end and purpose of imparting that Spirit and his powers. But, though we should admit a power, yet can we not suppose an inclination, in any evil spirits, to lend such an assistance as this to the promoting a persuasion so destructive of their interests and designs as the gospel and advancement of Christ's kingdom is manifestly known to be.

3. Next he proceeds upon that to which the two former particulars were a sort of introduction—the cause, the end, and the different sorts of spiritual gifts; all of great weight in the design he was driving on, as is evident from the use made of them in the following part of the chapter, and may easily be discerned by the portion of it now before us.

1. For, first, he insists that, how different soever the abilities, or the

^d 1 Cor. xii. 2.

^e Verse 3.

manner of exercising them, or the stations in which they were exercised, might be; yet still this was common to them all, that they were gifts, and that they were given by the same hand. Nor does he upon this occasion content himself with affirming upon general terms that God is the author of them; but diversifies his expression in such manner, as may be reasonably thought done with design to intimate the personality and divinity of the Holy Ghost, the Trinity of Persons in Unity of the Godhead, and the joint acting and equal concern of Father Son and Spirit in matters of this nature: however, the Scriptures, in condescension to our capacities, do sometimes (as here in particular) appropriate some actions and effects to one or other Person in the Deity in more special manner, or more frequently, than to the rest. This argument indeed runs through the whole Epistle for the day, but is chiefly contained in the fourth, fifth, sixth, and eleventh verses.

2. Secondly, he observes to them the end for which such gifts are bestowed. They must not be suffered to lie idle, but are expected to exert themselves vigorously. For which reason St. Paul seems to use a term of great emphasis when styling them *the manifestation of the Spirit*^f. Nor must they be employed in matters of little or no consequence and account; for they are *given to profit withal*. Nor must this *profit* be confined to the person's own self; for he who distributes them hath much larger views, and intends them for the benefit of the whole body mystical; to which St. Paul urges the duty of contributing, by comparing it with the body natural. Nor, lastly, may we patronise our sloth or our sullenness by a pretence of incapacity to do the public service: for, besides that the meanest members have their necessary uses, this *manifestation of the Spirit is given to every man to profit withal*; which had been lavishness, not liberality, if every man were not, by the help and industrious use of it, in a condition of becoming profitable; and, consequently, to account for the assistances that make him so.

3. Lastly, St. Paul mentions a great diversity of gifts, from the eighth to the eleventh verse: and this so as plainly implies two things: the first is, that in this distribution every one spoken of had some, but none had all; the second, that the sorts and the measures and the persons were so chosen and suited, as made most for the common benefit. This we may reasonably enough infer from the Spirit (the Spirit of wisdom and goodness and order) being said to *work them all*, and to *divide them severally as he will*: who, we ought to presume, as he best knows, so he never fails to choose, the fittest instruments. But if we carry our eye forward to the arguments couched in the apostle's allegory of the body natural, no question can be made but it was intended we should so understand him.

It must be sure allowed on all hands that the gifts in this discourse are those miraculous ones, which, though necessary in the first ages of the church, have long since been withdrawn upon that necessity ceasing. But I ought not to omit, that there are also assistances and gifts of use and continuance in all ages of Christianity, to which the

^f 1 Cor. xii. 7.

force of the apostle's reasoning extends itself. These likewise are the gifts of God, these are given to be exercised for promoting his glory and the good of mankind; and these are so distributed, that every man may be in some, though none in all respects serviceable; but all have their particular stations and endowments, in which, if rightly chosen and diligently improved, they are fitted to discharge their duty, by bringing honour to God and benefit to the world.

It is also presumed by some, that St. Paul here, as well as at the end of the chapter, speaks of gifts imparted to and exercised by those that are frequently distinguished under the title of *spiritual persons*; such as bore some office in the church, or administered in holy things. The occasions, and in proportions the supplies of these persons, no doubt, were greater than those of common men; and some of the gifts specified in this passage seem in a more peculiar manner accommodated to their character. But here again I cannot but apprehend it of importance for every Christian, in what capacity soever, to think himself concerned. And this, without all controversy, is the intent of our excellent church, when propounding this scripture in the yearly Epistle for this day to the pious meditation of all her children: that they might be reminded whence their good gifts come; awakened to a conscientious improvement of them; thankful for and contented with what they have received; humble and modest in the opinion of themselves; diligent in the business of their particular callings; useful and profitable to the body in general; tender and respectful to their brethren; compassionate to their failings, liberal and kind to their wants, and glad of their advantages. For these are the good qualities which this Epistle aims at promoting. The obligations to them, and the reasonableness of them, are deduced from hence in the following part of the chapter; and should have been explained and enforced by me at this time, had not the reader found both largely done upon the Epistles of the first and second Sundays after the Epiphany.

THE TENTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY.

THE GOSPEL. St. Luke xix. 41.

41 *And when he was come near, he beheld the city, and wept over it,*

42 *Saying, If thou hadst known, even thou, at least in this thy day, the things which belong unto thy peace! but now they are hid from thine eyes.*

to this purpose: O well had it been for thee, if thou wouldst have laid hold on the precious opportunities afforded thee for thy preservation! but those are now at an end, and the punishment of thy obstinacy resolved upon.

43 *For the days shall come upon thee, that thine enemies shall cast a trench about thee, and compass thee round, and keep thee in on every side,*

42. Expressing himself (as people in concern are apt to do, when they see all hopes of amendment past)

44 *And shall lay thee even with the ground, and thy children within thee; and they shall not leave in thee one stone upon another; because thou knewest not the time of thy visitation.*

45 *And he went into the temple, and began to cast out them that sold therein, and them that bought;*

46 *Saying unto them, It is written, My house is the house of prayer: but ye have made it a den of thieves.*

47 *And he taught daily in the temple.*

45, 46. See paraphrase on Matt. xxi. 12, 13. Gosp. for Advent Sunday.

COMMENT.

THE evangelist had just before described our blessed Saviour's triumphant passage to Jerusalem. The respects paid him in his way, and the general joy and acclamations at his entrance into the city, have been considered upon another occasion. The divine mixture of compassion and zeal then expressed by himself is the subject of this day's Gospel. The former was seen in those tears of pity drawn from his eyes, and the tender lamentation of that ruin, and all the dismal circumstances of it, which he here most punctually foretells^a, as a punishment now determined for avenging the Jews' obstinate infidelity and affected blindness. The latter appears in his resentment of the profanations committed upon the temple, in driving out those that sold and bought there, and reproaching them with that injustice and extortion which turned that house into a den of thieves^b, though they could not but be sensible that God had asserted a peculiar property in it, and designed it purely for the uses of piety and devotion.

The former of these heads would furnish proper matter for considering that dispensation of the Divine displeasure, whereby the day of a wicked person or people, that is, the time of God's grace or forbearance toward such, is shortened or brought to a full period; the evidence we have that this sometimes is done, and the justice of doing it; the nature of those offences that provoke it; the marks whereby a probable judgment may be made when the case is brought to this pass; and the deplorable misery of its being so. These are all topics of great use and moment, which I must at present be satisfied with hinting at, because by a former promise confined to the other part of this Gospel^c. The intent whereof is plainly to correct or prevent the profanation and abuse of places set apart for divine worship. The ground whereof being plainly laid in those words of the prophet which called the temple *God's house* and *the house of prayer*. My method in treating this argument shall be, first, to consider the case of the Jews, and their temple at Jerusalem; secondly, that of the Christian temples designed for the like uses; and, lastly, by one or two inferences, very briefly to advise such behaviour in

^a Verse 41—44.

^b Verse 45, 46.

^c See Gospel for Advent-Sunday.

them as may be most comely for the place and profitable for ourselves.

I. As to the Jews and their temple (first of all). None who have been at all conversant in the writings of the Old Testament can be ignorant what reverence was constantly paid, to the tabernacle first, and the temple afterwards. Nor were those extraordinary regards any part of the vain superstition to which that people were so exceedingly prone; but abundantly warranted, and even required, by the honours and titles given it by God himself. Accordingly we find it styled *the tent which God had pitched among men*—his *sanctuary*—his *dwelling*—his *courts*, and *palace*^a—his *holy mountain*—*the high and holy place inhabited by the high and holy One*^c—his *presence*^f—*the place which he had chosen out of all the earth to set his name there*^e. Add to this, that the apostle under the New Testament declares it to have been *the figure of the heavens*^h, and of that glorious seat *not made with hands*, where the glorious majesty of God more peculiarly resides. All which was shadowed by *the ark of the covenant*, by *the mercy-seat*, by *the cherubim* and *glory*. Nay, and (which is the last and highest pre-eminence due to it) this was also the type of God united to man, in the person of our blessed Saviour; and so dwelling *within the veil*, that is, (as the inspired author to the Hebrews interprets it,) *the flesh of Christ's human body*ⁱ.

Hither the most distant Israelites were commanded upon solemn occasions to repair; here to offer devotions and sacrifices for the acknowledging of past, and imploring future mercies: the prayers poured out here were supposed of all others to find quickest access and kindest acceptance. Which persuasion is the cause of so many doleful complaints for being debarred the privilege of attending at that throne, where God took special delight to hear and help. Thus David's affectionate lamentations express his banishment from the marks of God's peculiar presence and favour exhibited here, to be the circumstance of suffering which of all others sat heaviest upon his spirits^k; and he entreats more earnestly to be restored to the public assemblies for God's worship, than to his dignity and crown. The like pious tenderness we find in the captive Jews at Babylon, who were more sensibly afflicted by the demolishing of their temple, than by all the *ravage* and *desolation* brought upon the rest of their city and country^l. The favour afterwards found with heathen princes was chiefly improved by obtaining leave to rebuild the house of their God; and, upon such leave given, the holy men among them were more zealous in promoting that work than any other, either private or public reparations. These are but some out of many arguments; but these, I think, are sufficient to shew how the case stood with the Jews and their temple; how justly it was named *God's house* and *the house of prayer*. Let us now observe, in the

II. Second place, whether the same appellations do not properly belong to those places also which are set apart and now used by

^a Psalms lxxviii. 60—69; lxxiv. 1—10.

^c Isaiah lvi. 7; lvii. 15.

^f 2 Chron. xx. 9.

^e Deut. xvi. 16. 11.

^h Heb. ix.

ⁱ Heb. x. 20, 21.

^k See Psalm xlii. xliii.

lviii. lxxiv.

^l See Dan. ix. and the books of Ezra and Nehemiah.

Christians for their public worship of Almighty God. That these also are houses of prayer is evident from the original design and constant use of them. We do not indeed pretend that any one of ours is, like the Jewish temple, the only place in which God hath fixed his name and dwelling, for we hope his name and his presence of favour is in every one of them. And we endeavour to invite and to continue it there, by setting them apart to his service; by doing this with devout prayers, by solemn donations, and by appropriating them to religious uses, and excluding from them all others. These were the titles (strictly speaking) which secured his property in that at Jerusalem; and therefore suffer me to improve this occasion by saying somewhat very briefly concerning the fitness and the piety of building, consecrating, and adorning of churches.

1. First, we shall discover good reason for approving and commending the piety of building churches, if we at all attend to the necessity of it, in order to the exercise of religion. That God is to be worshipped in public as well as in private; that the more solemn, more general, more unanimous our acknowledgments of him are, the more becoming our duty, the more for his honour they are; is, I think, the voice of nature and reason, heard and confirmed by the universal consent of mankind. Now divine worship, like all other actions of finite creatures, must be determined to some particular place. Private and public both agree thus far. But then here lies the difference; that for his private service, though some places may be more, and others less commodious, yet none is unlawful or utterly unfit. He, we are told, is *about our path and about our bed*^m, in our parlours and our closets, in our gardens and our fields. And it were well if he were in all our thoughts too; and addressed to (as he might be without offence) in any or in all of these; and commonly the more retired and solitary such addresses are, the better they are. But public devotions cannot be thus performed. They ask a convenient reception for numbers that may resort to them. A reception which it is every one's duty to desire, and every one's right to partake of. And because the correspondence we are allowed to hold with Almighty God is of a nature so distant from the affairs and encumbrances of this world; therefore the general practice of mankind hath been, not only to have places for this purpose, but places severed and manifestly distinguished from common dwellings. Why may we not suppose the heathens of old, in erecting their altars about mountains and groves, and other places of privacy and retirement, were governed partly by a natural instinct insinuating that the business of religion is best promoted when we retreat from noise, and leave the world and its cares behind us; and that God, who is the Father and Giver of all, ought to have somewhat among us which may in a peculiar manner be called his own?

2. This brings me to speak, secondly, of consecrating our churches. The manner whereof, in short, is, after such donations by the builder or benefactors as may be a fund for securing their reparations, and prevent their returning to common uses any more, to deliver them over

to the bishop, (who in this, as in some other rites, acts as God's representative,) for the sole service and property of the *great Shepherd and Bishop of souls*. He, having thus received them in Christ's stead, does by an authentic act separate them accordingly; and then by proper prayers implore God's favour and acceptance, and his readiness to hear the prayers, and prosper the good instructions, and confirm and bless with a saving efficacy the holy sacraments which shall at any time be there presented to and administered before him.

The former part of this solemnity hath been by some thought unnecessary, upon the suggestions that the very assembling of people together for public business renders the place in which they assemble public: and if those assemblies be upon religious accounts, this is presumed to make the place holy too. But each of these is plainly a mistake. For it is not the matter transacted in it, but the right and title to it that makes any place public or private. If a corporation (for instance) shall meet and despatch any affairs relating to that society, in their chief magistrate's dwellinghouse, this does not make his house to become their common hall. But the difference still remains in point of property; of the one to a private owner, of the other to the whole body. Now that which makes any thing public, is giving the public a title to it; and that which denominates things of this nature holy, is separating them from vulgar, and appropriating them to sacred uses. The mere serving one's self of such things in the ministration of holy offices is not sufficient, except it be also surrendered up to God; ourselves divested of all personal right, and he put into full possession. When this is done, to alienate or take it back is robbery and sacrilege; but till then, the house is no more God's than our closets where we say our prayers, or the cups in which sick persons communicate at home. So reasonable, so necessary it is, that the houses built and intended for the service of God should have an end thus put to all private claims and pretensions.

The latter part of this solemnity, consisting of prayers and intercessions, Scripture hath given us express authority for; particularly in that dedication of Solomon's temple, which received signal testimonies of God's approbationⁿ. And considering how bold men are apt to make, and with what undaunted avarice they sometimes prey upon a distant and invisible avenger, somewhat of form is necessary to restrain that insolence; for which nothing can be more proper than those impressions, that such an authoritative and devout separation is naturally fitted to make upon minds not perfectly obdurate.

3. Lastly, for the adorning of our churches: if any (here with us in particular) shall blame the expense of it, I cannot (to speak my mind freely) but wish there were yet more ground ministered for that objection than generally there seems to be; for sure a decency in this regard is conformable to every man's sense, who professes to retain any reverence for God and religion. The magnificence of the first Jewish temple is sufficiently known^o, and the severe reproofs for too sparing contributions to the second^p. Far from us be all ornaments

ⁿ 1 Kings viii.^o 1 Kings vii.^p Haggai i. ii.

unbecoming the worship of a spirit or the gravity of a church. But sure it hath a very ill aspect for men to be contentedly and sordidly frugal, and to think that well enough in God's house which they would not endure even in the meanest offices of their own. Religion should not be dressed in the habit of a wanton, but do not deny her that of a matron. Let her be modest in her garb, but withal comely and clean; and allow her enough, not only to protect her from shame and contempt, but to draw some respect too. If some have injured her by a false and too artificial beauty, this is no reason why we should think it a virtue to turn pious clowns and slovens, by running into the contrary extreme, and *worshipping the Lord* in the dirt and deformity of holiness. St. Paul, disputing against prayers and prophecy in an unknown tongue, bids his Corinthians imagine a stranger coming into such a congregation¹, and then judge of their own practice by the sentence which their own reason must needs tell them such a one will naturally pass upon it. And if we in like manner appeal to the common sense of mankind, no more would be needful to convince the fitness of liberality and largeness of heart in the service of God, whom we profess and are bound to revere and honour and love to the uttermost: and that neglecting to provide things decent and honourable for it must needs provoke others at once to despise our pretended piety, and to abhor the service of the Lord. *Offer this to thy governor,* (says the prophet,) *will he accept thy person, or be pleased with it?* And though God do not value our splendour or our pomp, yet (as he goes on there) *if we offer the blind or the lame for sacrifice, is it not evil?* that is, if men think nothing too good for their own use, and nothing too bad for his, they may call him *Master* and *Father*, but these notions and proceedings plainly prove that he is not the object either of their *honour* or of their *fear*.

By this time, I hope, it sufficiently appears that God hath an equal right to every Christian, as he had to the one Jewish temple: the rather, because the original design of those words, *My house is the house of prayer*, was to foretell the enlargement of Christ's church, and the new state of affairs under the gospel-dispensation. This is evident from that remarkable addition in Isaiah, *My house shall be called the house of prayer for all people*. Whereby the bringing in of the Gentiles to the faith is expressly foretold. And if the case stands thus, then surely we are obliged to consider in the

III. Third and last place, what respect is due to these houses, and how men are expected to behave themselves there. To which purpose I shall mention two particulars, the one regarding the church as it is the *house of God*; the other, as it is the *house of prayer*.

1. First, these houses, considered as God's, oblige us to demean ourselves in them as under God's more immediate presence and observation. His presence and his eyes, no doubt, are every where; but yet we are taught to believe that he manifests himself in some places after a more especial manner than in others. Of this, one token among the Jews was thought to be the ministry of angels; and those invisible spirits have been commonly believed to attend continually

¹ 1 Cor. xiv.² Mal. i. 6, 8.³ Luke xix. 46.⁴ Isaiah lvi. 7.

upon the public worship of God; to observe and assist and invigorate and protect and maintain an intercourse between pious congregations upon earth and the throne of grace in heaven. This many interpreters have presumed to be St. Paul's sense of the matter, when prescribing rules of decency in places of this nature, *because of the angels*^u. But be that as it will, we attribute to these places no holiness inherent and essential, but such as is relative only, and due for the sake of their owner and inhabitant. And therefore all aspersions that charge such respect with idolatry or superstition, proceed either from great ignorance or great perverseness.

2. Secondly, as these are *houses of prayer*, let me entreat that every man would be careful effectually to make them such to himself. That the offices, I mean, performed there may be frequented conscientiously—and joined in devoutly. The benefits of public prayer are many and great. And our petitions, when with united force ascending to heaven, bid much fairer for acceptance and success, than any the most vehement importunities of a single and solitary devotion. Particularly the unanimous and uniform prayers of the church express the unity of our faith, our mutual charity, our joint relation to Christ the mystical head of this body. In this regard prayer and sacraments have an advantage above reading or hearing, or any other religious duties. And probably this may be one main reason why God's house is called *the house of prayer*. For preaching and expounding are indeed instructions in our duty sent from God for our good; but we may be instructed by pious advice and useful books at home: we may likewise pray alone; but we cannot do the one or the other alone, so as shall testify to the world our communion with Christ and with one another, like the same things done in the public assemblies of Christians. Hence every one should make a conscience of improving every opportunity for such prayers; because every one is obliged to acknowledge that spiritual society, the being a member whereof does (ordinarily speaking) put him in a capacity of salvation.

But to come is a small thing, unless we join too; join with our hearts, with our mouths, with our whole bodies. The minister pronounces the petitions in the people's name and behalf, but do not suppose that he will be heard for any who neglect to pray for themselves. Every one therefore should repeat the confessions, to acknowledge his own sin and vileness; and the creeds, to declare and confirm his own faith; and the Lord's prayer, to call God Father with his own mouth. The people's hearts should go silently and reverently along with him in all the other parts of the service, and confirm every collect for themselves, by expressing the earnest desires of their souls in a distinct and hearty *Amen*. As oft as he says, *Let us pray*, they should re-collect their wandering thoughts, rouse their heavy hearts, and double their vehemence and zeal. And throughout all the litanies and answers they should be very diligent to do their part; esteeming it (as in truth it is) a singular privilege, that the lay-members of the church of England have a greater share allotted to them in her offices than those of any other persuasion I ever heard of. And yet it is

^u 1 Cor. xl. 10.

observable, that in other reformed churches the care to qualify themselves for joining is greater, and the people's neglect of joining upon these occasions much more unusual and scandalous. This is in truth a duty, from which nothing but ignorance can excuse; and that might soon be remedied, and ought to be so, by the early principles of a religious education, as soon as possibly it can. They whose unhappiness it is to have wanted this, must be the more careful to supply that defect, by reverent gestures, composure of mind, and diligent attention. This I may take upon me to affirm, that if our public prayers be defective, it must be on the part of those that use them; for the church hath taken admirable care of her part. And by the prudent constitution of a most excellent liturgy, gives us great hopes of obtaining the mercy which we are directed to beg in the collect for this day; namely, that being thus taught to *ask such things as please God, his merciful ears will be open* (and may they ever be open!) *to the prayers of us his humble servants, through Jesus Christ our Lord.* Amen.

THE ELEVENTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY.

THE COLLECT.

O God, who declarest thy almighty power most chiefly in shewing mercy and pity; Mercifully grant unto us such a measure of thy grace, that we, running the way of thy commandments, may obtain thy gracious promises, and be made partakers of thy heavenly treasure; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

THE EPISTLE. I Cor. xv. 1.

1 *Brethren, I declare unto you the gospel which I preached unto you, which also ye have received, and wherein ye stand;* 1. As to the point of the resurrection from the dead, (the calling which into question is another abuse now prevailing among you,) I must put you in mind what ye were taught concerning it at your first conversion to the Christian faith;

2 *By which also ye are saved, if ye keep in memory what I preached unto you, unless ye have believed in vain.* 2. That faith, by which ye are entitled to salvation, if ye retain and persevere in it; and have not fallen back again, and condemned your first assent as rash and over credulous.

3 *For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures;* 3, 4. Now the foundation, on which that faith was built, I laid in the death of Christ, the end and purpose of that death,

4 *And that he was buried, and that he*

rose again the third day according to the scriptures: and the certainty of his resurrection; all of them exactly agreeable to the prophecies relating to this matter, and confirmed by unquestionable evidence.

5 And that he was seen of Cephas, then of the twelve: 5. For he was seen after his resurrection by Simon Peter (Luke xxiv. 34.), by the whole college of apostles (Luke xxiv. 36, &c. John xx. 19, &c. 26, &c.).

6 After that, he was seen of above five hundred brethren at once; of whom the greater part remain unto this present, but some are fallen asleep. 6. Afterwards by a very great number of believers in Galilee, according to his own promise and appointment (Matth. xxvi. 32. xxviii. 10. Mark xiv. 28.), most of whom are still alive to testify the truth of it; but some of them are dead.

7 After that, he was seen of James; 7. He was also seen of them of all the apostles. James the brother of our Lord, and first bishop of Jerusalem. He visibly ascended into heaven in the presence of all the apostles. (Luke xxiv. 50, 51. Mark xvi. 19. Acts i. 4, 9, 10, 11, 12.)

8 And last of all he was seen of me also, as of one born out of due time. 8. And after that ascent he appeared to me (Acts ix. xiii. xxvi.), as to one not mature for earlier discoveries, and, like an abortive birth, below the just dimensions of an apostle.

9 For I am the least of the apostles, that am not meet to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. 9. For I am not worthy that title and character, because formerly a persecutor of him and his truth.

10 But by the grace of God I am what I am: and his grace which was bestowed upon me was not in vain; but I laboured more abundantly than they all: yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me. 10. But the exceeding goodness of God hath made me what I now am. And that mercy I have endeavoured to shew myself sensible of, by an indefatigable labour and zeal in his service. The glory whereof is still in no degree due to me, but to that grace of God entirely, which gave me both the heart and the ability to do what I have done for the propagation of his gospel.

11: Therefore whether it were I or they, so we preach, and so ye believed. 11. In which I have religiously kept to the pattern set me by the other apostles. All of us agreeing in the same doctrine so punctually, that by what hand soever it is received, yet in the principles inculcated by your preachers, and embraced by our hearers, there is not the least difference.

COMMENT.

It hath been formerly observed*, that one of the corruptions in the church of Corinth, which St. Paul by this Epistle endeavoured to reform, was the disbelief of the resurrection and a future state. Upon that subject he treats in this fifteenth chapter; and the first step

* Epist. for the ninth Sunday after Trinity.

taken toward the proof of it is by establishing the certainty of our Lord's resurrection. Which doctrine he afterwards makes use of, not only as an evidence of the raising of our bodies being a thing possible in itself; but as a pledge of our resurrection to follow hereafter, by virtue of the conquest over death exemplified in his, already past. This argument is handled at large in the following parts of his discourse; but that part now in hand may be reduced to two heads: the former consists in the assertion of our Lord's dying and rising from the dead, as a necessary article of the Christian faith^b; as a point exactly agreeable to the prophecies of the Old Testament concerning the Messiah^c; and as a fact supported by a multitude of testimonies of undoubted veracity and credit^d. The latter is incidental, and a digression concerning himself. Wherein this apostle hath left us an example of these following virtues:

1. Of humility, and a mean opinion of our own performances, even when highly useful and commendable; in allowing to others their just praises and deserts, and being so far from any vainglorious emulation, or detracting from their worth, as to practise that modesty and *lowliness of mind* elsewhere prescribed, of *esteeming others better than ourselves*—*I am the least of the apostles, &c.*^f

2. A frequent recollection even of those faults from which it is our happiness to be perfectly reclaimed. For though God, in the greatness of his mercy, vouchsafe to blot out and forget these, yet it is highly necessary for us to keep them in remembrance. This is an admirable expedient for preventing all ill effects of that spiritual pride, so apt to get ground upon men eminently good; to awaken our caution and just fears of relapse, by reflecting what we have been and may be again, and to preserve a thankful sense of the change made in us—*I am not meet to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God.*

3. A very extraordinary diligence and zeal to make reparation, by the following part of our lives, for any omissions, neglects, or notorious crimes, whereby our consciences have been wounded, or the cause and credit of truth and religion may have suffered heretofore—*I laboured more abundantly than they all*^h.

4. Even when this change and reparation shall be made, arrogating no merit or glory to ourselves; but ascribing the whole to God's goodness, and the operations of his blessed Spirit: *By the grace of God I am what I am*: and again, *Yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me*. The first general topic hath been sufficiently spoken to, upon the gospels for Easter day and the two days following. The example set us in the latter will more properly find an enlargement in my discourses upon the day set apart by the church for commemorating this blessed apostle's conversion.

^b Verse 1, 2.^c Verse 3.^d Verse 4—8.^e Phil. ii. 3.^f 1 Cor. xv. 9.^g Ib.^h Verse 10.

THE ELEVENTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY.

THE GOSPEL. St. Luke xviii. 9.

9 *Jesus spake this parable unto certain which trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others :* 9. To the former parable, encouraging our fervency and perseverance in prayer,

Jesus added the following one, to mortify the vanity of them who are highly conceited of their own sanctity, and think meanly of their brethren. Of both which faults the Pharisees were generally guilty.

10 *Two men went up into the temple to pray; the one a Pharisee, and the other a publican.*

11 *The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican.*

12 *I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all that I possess.* 12. I observe the law in its utmost rigour, nay, I even go beyond it; keeping two fasts a week, for which I have only tradition; and tithing even mint, anise, and cummin, (See Matth. xxiii. 23.) which whether they be tithable or not is matter of dispute.

13 *And the publican, standing afar off, would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, God be merciful to me a sinner.* 13. The publican, by keeping at a distance, by dejected looks, and every gesture that could signify a sense of his own unworthiness, and deep remorse, did in few words and most humble manner implore pardon for his many and great offences.

14 *I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other: for every one that exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted.* 14. And this man God pardoned and approved rather than that proud uncharitable Pharisee. And so he always does prefer the lowly and self-condemned before the haughty and self-conceited man.

COMMENT.

THE temptations that beset us are so thick and strong, that, were there nothing to threaten our ruin, but merely the known transgressions of God's law, our utmost care were necessary, our constant fears were just; whether we consider the enemy's force who attacks us, or our own weakness and want of resolution to encounter him. But when our very virtues are made instruments of undoing us, this gives a fresh and more awakening view of our danger; and of a foe, whose stratagems will not fail to meet us, even when we think ourselves at greatest distance from them. And such is the unhappiness of our case. The subtle adversary of souls finds ways to convert our very zeal for religion to his own malicious purposes; and, if we be not upon our guard, makes us yet more the children of hell, by taking advantage of those very satisfactions which are meant to support and invigorate us in the love and pursuit of heaven.

The gospel indeed propounds the comfortable testimonies of our conscience as [a very powerful encouragement to holiness of life. But, alas! those comforts are exceeding apt to degenerate into confidences, and blow us up with high conceits of our own sufficiency. The wickedness of others, which should be seen with pity, we hardly forbear insulting over secretly; are apt to despise the men as well as detest the crimes; to take false measures of ourselves from them, and judge our own proportions by disdainful and wicked comparisons. A method the more hazardous and fatally deceitful, because always founded upon either some real or some supposed perfections. And yet this puts us farther off from safety than the sins of those guilty wretches we so much condemn. For a very profligate and scandalous conversation, when reflected upon with a truly sorrowful and self-reproaching mind, does, it seems, minister more hope, and procures a more favourable access to the throne of grace, than any the most ravishing contemplations of our own imagined excellencies are able to do.

This truth our Lord designing to illustrate, does here by way of parable describe a Pharisee and a publican together in the temple. The end of their repairing thither was the same, for they both *went up to pray*ⁱ. But in this, their behaviour was very different, and their success no less so. The Pharisee, approaching with great boldness, and highly contented with himself, triumphs in his innocence of such gross crimes as others too commonly abandoned themselves to; and in some punctual observances, to which all did not hold themselves obliged. The publican, full of remorse and confusion, only laments his vileness, and humbly implores mercy. Yet see the surprising issue. That gay insulting man was particularly careful to distinguish himself from his poor dejected companion: he very solemnly gave God thanks that he was not *as this publican*; and he was not as this publican indeed: for our Saviour hath shewed us the difference between them in these words, *I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other*^k.

This passage is no doubt a good instruction with what disposition of mind it is fit we approach Almighty God. It proves that lowliness and modesty, and a consciousness of our own guilt and misery, are proper qualifications to recommend our prayers. But it seems to have a still more general view—that of discountenancing spiritual pride and a contempt of other people. For the ninth verse takes express notice of its being directed to persons *who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others*. Such it intends to mortify, by declaring, that even the vilest sinners, when vile in their own sight, are preferred by God before the haughty self-conceited righteous. The equity of which proceeding though our Lord's single authority might suffice to persuade us of, yet we may do well to consider and satisfy ourselves in some reasons for it, under the three following heads:

I. First, the character of the parties concerned here.

II. Secondly, the difference of their respective dispositions.

III. Thirdly, the reasons which render the one so much less, the other so much more, agreeable to Almighty God.

I. I begin with the character of the two parties concerned in this parable, the one a Pharisee, the other a publican. Pharisee is a title importing separation. Not that this sect of men were separatists from the established religion of their country; but because they set to themselves stricter rules of living, and affected a distinction from the vulgar, by higher degrees of sanctity, and some particular observances which the Jews in general did not look upon themselves bound to. Hence came their glosses on the ritual law of Moses, which strained its precepts to their utmost rigour: hence many traditions entirely new, and held in equal authority with, though sometimes corruptions of, the written word^l: hence their exceeding niceness in washing of pots and vessels and tables^m; their formal purifications after coming from places of public concourse; their supercilious declining of promiscuous conversation; their frequent reproaches of our blessed Saviour for eating with mixed company and unwashen handsⁿ. Hence, lastly, St. Paul alleges before Agrippa^o, that he formerly *lived after the most straitest sect of the Jews' religion, a Pharisee*: and hence, as he tells the Galatians^p, he became an extraordinary proficient in that religion, and *more exceedingly zealous of the traditions of his fathers*.

The publicans, on the other hand, were properly those officers whom the Roman governors employed as collectors of their customs. And these, while servants of the state, demeaned themselves more honourably, and lived in good credit enough. But in process of time, when those duties were farmed, and came into private hands, they gave themselves over to all manner of merciless oppression, and seemed to be lost to all sense of justice and common modesty. How infamous the men of this profession were in our Saviour's time, we need no other proof than the Scripture itself; which, by joining together publicans and sinners, publicans and harlots, publicans and heathens, shews with what company they were thought to be most suitably ranked. As a Pharisee then denotes a scrupulous and most precise Jew, who professes to make the greatest conscience of his duty; so a publican is but another name for a wretch that never troubles himself with duty or conscience at all; one that sticks at nothing that is base and scandalous, but is an open, profligate, shameless knave.

The more amazing must it needs be, that a wretch so abominable should find grace, and one who thought he needed no mercy should fall short of it. And in regard God is no partial judge, but weighs every man's prayers and person in an even and just balance, somewhat of moment there must have been which made so strange a difference between them. Now what this was I am about to explain, so far as this parable will guide us into the dispositions of these men respectively; which makes the subject of my second head.

II. The Pharisee's temper is sufficiently discovered by the form of his prayer: *God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican*. The style is insolent and boasting, that of a herald rather than a suppliant. For even the thanks he would seem to give speak sufficiency and self-satisfac-

^l Matt. xv.^m Mark vii.ⁿ Matt. ix; Luke viii. x; Mark ii. vii.^o Acts xxvi. 5.^p Gal. i. 14.^q Luke xviii. 11.

tion, and do not so much render God his praises as they proclaim his own. Pride therefore is his first remarkable blemish; and that the very worst sort, spiritual pride, and such security as we find styled at the 9th verse *a trusting in himself that he was righteous*.

But, admitting so lofty an opinion of his own excellencies to be never so just, yet what necessity, what warrant or privilege could he have to disparage and vilify his brethren? Was there no way to bless God for being good himself, but by representing every body else to be stark naught? *I am not as other men are*. What could be more fulsome vanity than thus to set himself off as an exception to a whole world at once? *Or even as this publican*: to break that bruised reed, and with scornful reproaches to fall foul on a wounded soul, whose sins, and whose penitent sorrow much more, called for the compassion and comfort of every stander by. So that the second charge against this Pharisee and his prayer was, that he *despised others*^r.

The publican, quite contrary, in all his expressions, in all his deportment, speaks nothing but shame and confusion, the tenderest contrition, and most profound humility. He *stands afar off*, as not presuming upon a nearer approach to the presence of so holy a Majesty. He *lifts not up so much as his eyes unto heaven*, but by the guilt and melancholy of his countenance takes to himself the ignominious titles so liberally bestowed by his scornful companion. He *smites his breast*, as conscious of the pollutions lodged there; looks not abroad, but confines his thoughts to his own misery; alleges nothing in his own behalf, no mixture of good to balance or mitigate the evil of his past life; feels no comfort, seeks no refuge, except in the mercy of a forgiving God; brings no motive to incline that mercy, but a sorrowful sense of his own unworthiness, and an humble hope in God's unbounded goodness. And therefore upon this, this saving, this only supporting attribute, he casts himself entirely, with a—*God be merciful to me a sinner*!

Such are the persons represented to us by the foregoing parable: a Pharisee, bursting full of pride and censoriousness and disdain; and a publican, as despicable and meek and low, as guilt and sorrow and humility could lay him. And yet the event is, that *this man, who humbled himself, was exalted, and that, who exalted himself, was abased*. Nor is it thus in a single instance only, but our Lord draws it into a general conclusion, and declares it shall always be thus; that such preference is agreeable to justice and equity, and those rules and measures upon which God constantly proceeds. The reasonableness whereof that we may be in some convenient degree able to comprehend, I design, under my third and last head, to shew how deservedly the former of these persons found a less favourable reception than the latter. In order whereunto it will be necessary to observe the nature, first, of that vicious disposition manifest in the Pharisee; secondly, that of the righteousness he so vainly trusted in; and, thirdly, how the publican differed from him in both.

1. The disposition blamable in this Pharisee is pride; and in consequence of that, uncharitable censoriousness and contempt of his

^r Luke xviii. 13.

^s Luke xviii. 14.

brothren. Than which there are not, in all the black catalogue of vices, any more deservedly hateful to God, more injurious to men, or more prejudicial to our own selves.

It was pride that first brought rebellion and strife into heaven, and cast down the apostate angels thence, who affected to be equal or superior to their God and Creator; it is pride that inspires obstinacy and contempt of the same divine Majesty in every presumptuous offender who quenches his Spirit, casts his word behind him, and tramples his laws underfoot. Nor is this the seed of all malicious wickedness only, but it poisons and blasts our righteousness itself, stains all the beauty, and loses all the reward of it. For every proud man robs God of the honour due to his providence and his grace, erects now altars to strange deities, and, by the wildest of all idolatry, burns incense to himself. So boldly does he entrench upon, so highly does he provoke the jealousy of Him who solemnly declares that *he will not give his glory to another*, nor part with his praise to any supposed excellencies; which are so many images that our distempered fancies first form and grave to themselves, and then fall down and worship them.

Upon our neighbour pride is an insupportable encroachment. For it renders men haughty and assuming in their carriage, peevish and perverse in their humour, troublesome and contentious in business, cavilling and captious in conversation, jealous of affronts that were never intended, and full of resentments for injuries that were never done, insensible of the misfortunes that happen to their brethren, severe upon their infirmities, and implacable for their faults. Upon these, and upon many other accounts, the proud man renders himself a common enemy: for he lives at defiance with all mankind, and puts them upon their guard to defend those rights and privileges and respects which he so arbitrarily endeavours to tear from them, and esteems the placing upon any other a loss and robbery to himself.

But most especially is this vice destructive to a man's own soul. For it taints all our principles, and pursues wrong ends; it covers our lurking faults, and draws a veil before our weaknesses and wants; prevents all repentance, and proves a certain bar to all improvement. It shuts the door against admonition and reproof, forbids the advice of friends, and silences the checks of conscience. To one so full of himself as to see no need of amendment, nor any perfection to which in imagination he hath not already attained, all discipline and kindness must needs be lost, all reasonings of his own mind must needs be ineffectual. For every thing there is seen through a false light and false glasses. The most slender appearances of virtue are brought nearer and magnified, the most deformed blemishes are thrown off at a vast distance and lessened to the eye; delusion only reigns, and truth is never received, till some awakening dispensation does at last, perhaps too late, discover the man to himself.

But that is not all. For as the proud man is impatient to be uppermost, so he closes with the basest methods for being so, and raises himself upon the ruins and rubbish of all that stand in his way. This is the man who above all others is pragmatistical and curious,

factions and froward, inquisitive that he may find faults, insulting when he hath found them, and where none can be found, industrious to make them. Envy and spite and calumny are his character; every man's parts and power and wealth and reputation are a plague and grief to him; all the light he shines by is borrowed and comparative; detraction and defamation supply the place of true intrinsic worth; and therefore every other name must be blackened to add lustre to his own. So dangerous, so monstrous a creature is a proud man. But especially a proud supercilious Pharisee, that exalts himself with rapturous reflections upon his own piety and preciseness, and triumphs in not being *as other men are*, but much more pure, more perfect than they; for all other men indeed to him are *even as this publican*.

But, my brethren, (as was once said to Samuel,) *Look not on this man's countenance, or on the height of his stature; because God hath refused him: for the Lord seeth not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the Lord looketh on the heart.* He is not imposed upon by form and show, but draws off the mask from a dissembling Pharisee, carries his eye to the bottom of the whited sepulchre, and treats him according to the rottenness and dead bones within. He, through the melancholy guise of a dejected publican, beholds and values humility and true contrition—virtues in the sight of God of great price. And, though they do not sparkle or cast so glaring a light, have yet more of the real warmth and spirit of religion than all the dazzling beauties of that counterfeit face of godliness with which the Pharisee takes so much pains to dress himself out. Had the virtues he arrogated to himself been never so substantial and commendable, yet his intemperate overrating them, and uncharitable censoriousness, had been an alloy sufficient to debase them. But his, after all, were not standard. There is indeed a glistening, but no such intrinsic value in them as he fondly imagined; as I am now about to make appear, by considering,

2. Secondly, the nature of that righteousness he so vainly trusted in. Now here we shall do well to observe,

(1.) That the foundation of those excellencies he supposed in himself lies chiefly in comparisons—*I am not as other men are—I am not as this publican*. A most deceitful way of arguing, but yet too commonly indulged; by which men are betrayed into taking false measures of themselves, and speaking such comforts to their own consciences as no way belong to them. For what advantages can another's faults bring to us? It is certain each man's actions are the proper issue he shall be judged upon; those of our brethren cannot be considered in the account. And for a man to be esteemed righteous here, or depend upon being happy hereafter, because some others are more wicked now, or shall be more miserable than, is not less absurd than it were for one bankrupt to boast of his wealth because another is gone off for a larger sum; or for a person actually in sickness and pain to fancy he hath perfect ease and health, because his neighbour's paroxysms and torments are more frequent and acute than his own.

(2.) The offences this Pharisee disavows are *adultery, extortion, injustice*, such, in a word, as very profligate people are supposed to abandon themselves to; and the standing clear of these is no doubt a blessing of which every man ought to have a very thankful sense. For we are all by nature frail, and capable even of the most horrible enormities; but yet the virtue requisite for commending us to God must be a great deal more than this comes to. These sins indeed expose us to shame and reproach; but conscience, not reputation, is the principle we are to proceed upon. And they who do so will be equally scrupulous of transgressing in less heinous, less scandalous instances. For those also must be reckoned for with God, though they do not alike draw upon us the censure and condemnation of men. Adultery and extortion, it is true, are grievous crimes: but it is as true that pride, and uncharitable judging, and insolent despising of our brethren, are so too. And do not our Saviour's rebukes to the Pharisees teach us what sort of people those are who profess the utmost abhorrence of the former, and yet make the latter their daily practice without any remorse at all? Is not this to court the name more than the substance of religion, to *strain at a gnat* when men look on, and yet make no bones of *a camel* when none are privy to the swallowing it but God and themselves? And I conceive we do this Pharisee no wrong in saying, that the plain English of what he thanks God for here is in effect but thus much—that he was clear, not of all, but of the grossest and most infamous vices, had lived more cautiously than many others, and been hitherto successful in deceiving the world with a pretence and pomp of godliness without the true power of it. For such was,

3. Thirdly, the frequent fastings and exact tithings in which he expressed so great satisfaction. Acts of piety both, which carry an appearance of extraordinary devotion and severity, and some neglects of interest and pleasure, which others thought they might very innocently forbear. Such as would give men a character of virtue above the common size, and dispose the vulgar to bestow such distinguishing titles as, *the punctual tither—the constant faster*, and the like; but when weighed in the balance, these too will be found wanting, and that in the following regards particularly:

1. First, these acts of piety have much less of difficulty in them than the attaining to any tolerable advancement in solid and substantial virtue. Praying and fasting often commit no very great violence upon nature; but it is one thing to abstain from a meal, and another to subdue a corrupt appetite, or reduce an exorbitant passion. For we see the Pharisee now before us, who imposed this penance upon himself twice every week, was yet very far from having humbled his soul with that fasting, and mortifying either the vain conceit of his own merit or his contemptuous disdain of other people.

2. Secondly, such acts and exercises, as they have less difficulty, so have they less, they have indeed no worth or efficacy, without substantial and moral virtue. For it may be of moment to observe that some things in religion are of intrinsic goodness, and enjoined for their own sakes; whereas others are commanded for the sake of and in order

to farther and better ends. Thus fasting and praying and reading and hearing, and the like, are not so much parts of true godliness themselves as helps and furtherances toward it. We fast and pray and read and hear to the intent we may be fitted for practice. But if our passions be not subdued, fasting is formality; if our lives be not amended, hearing is in vain; if our good deeds be not answerable to our devotions, prayer is but lip-labour. But now justice and charity and humility, and such like, are subordinate to no higher attainments in this world. They recommend us to the favour and acceptance of God effectually, and aim at and prepare us for the bliss and glories of a future state. So that however the former sort of duties may carry a more solemn face, and attract the eyes and admiration of the world, yet these are of infinitely more weight and value; for till they change the man, and model his mind aright, those are but empty shadows and deceitful appearances of virtue. I call them *deceitful* appearances, because,

3. Thirdly, those acts, if not prudently ordered, are liable to this farther mighty inconvenience, that they abate our zeal in the pursuit of solid virtue, and are capable of being turned to serve very ill purposes. They frequently impose upon our judgment by false notions of religion, and expose us to the danger of placing it where it really is not. They dispose us to imaginary confidences, and carry the mind away after ceremony and show; devour much of our leisure, employ much of our pains; and, which is worst of all, put us upon despising the more valuable but less pompous instances of goodness. They betray indiscreet people into that fatal error of supposing that the breach of the second table may be bought off and compounded for by an uncommon niceness in the observation of the first; and that some peculiar voluntary severities will bear them out in the neglect of plain commands, and atone for many and grievous violations of moral duty. Thus our blessed Saviour reproves the *tithing of mint and anise and cummin*, as taken in to supply the place of *righteousness and mercy and faith*, by much *the weightier matters of the law*^a. Thus *fasting and hanging down the head like a bulrush* is exposed by Isaiah^b, because many who did so *fasted for strife and debate, and to smite with the fist of wickedness*. And thus the length of the Pharisees' prayers is represented as an artifice to cover their oppression in *decouring widows' houses*^c. Nor were these abuses confined to that people or that generation, but every age and every persuasion have seen and felt the mischief of laying too great a stress upon affected austerities and devotions. And we cannot but know by experience what a cloak to injustice a precise conversation hath oftentimes been made by dissembling wretches, whose godliness is gain; saints on God's day, but devils all the rest of the week; and whose zeal consists, not so much in amending themselves, as in censuring and slandering, condemning and despising every body else.

If then the pretended innocence of this Pharisee before us was so short and imperfect, and if his boasted righteousness was liable to so just exceptions, our wonder may very well cease that his prayer

^a Matt. xxiii. 23.

^b Isaiah lviii. 4, 5.

^c Luke xx. 47.

found no better acceptance, and that even that publican, the object of his scorn, should return home *justified* rather than he. For though we are at liberty to suppose this man's former life very blamable, yet the stains of his guilt appear to have been washed away by repentance; a repentance which proved its own sincerity by the profoundest remorse and the exemplary modesty of his behaviour. These shew him to us a pattern of true humility; a virtue more valuable than all the fasting in the world; as taking down that partial conceit and self-love, which the philosophers of old wisely called the inmost garment of the soul, the vicious passion which sticks closest to us, and of all others is last and hardest put off. A virtue that carries its own commendation, pleasing to God, beneficial to our brethren, and improving to ourselves. For it defrauds none, hurts none, but renders to all their due: to God, by magnifying his mercy and grace, and unfeignedly lamenting our own vileness and impotence; to men, by allowing, nay, by rejoicing in their just praises and deserts. It detracts not, judges not, slanders not, despises not, but contains itself within its own sphere; triumphs not in the faults of others, but shews every man his own. It opens our ear to discipline, makes us fit to be treated with, easy to be persuaded, susceptible of advice, patient of reproof; and by laying our mouths in the dust, by disavowing all merit, and taking sanctuary only in mercy, makes its foundation deep and strong, a sure foundation of *a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens* ².

The sum of all, I think, amounts to thus much; that however men may mistake themselves, or one another, *God always hath respect unto the lowly, but beholds the proud afar off* ^a. That no past offences, how many, how heinous, how habitual and inveterate soever, will shut out from his pardon any sinner who humbly bewails and heartily forsakes them: that a lofty conceit of our own sufficiency differs as much from the testimony of a truly good conscience, as the swellings of a disease from the kindly proportions of a healthful body: that a theatrical affectation of godliness, with pride and uncharitableness, and disdainful judgment of others, is nearer to hell than a long profligate and scandalous course of life with contrition and charity and lowness of spirit: that it behoves us therefore to take good heed, lest even the most solemn duties of religion be abused and turned against us; and that he only attends upon these as he ought who really mortifies his vanity and his passions, and brings himself to be more humble, more charitable, more sensible of his own failings, and less severe upon those of other people: and, lastly, that the proper way of a sinner's applying for mercy and grace (and all of us are sinners) is not arrogantly to thank God that we are *not as other men are*, but, as the purest of churches hath directed us, *meekly to acknowledge our vileness, and truly to repent us of our faults*. For our good Lord hath promised, and it is the express design of this parable to assure us, that *they whose consciences by sin are accused, by his merciful pardon shall be absolved, through Jesus Christ our Saviour*. To whom, &c.

^a 2 Cor. v. 1.

^a Psalm cxxxviii. 6.

^b See Collect in Communion Service.

THE TWELFTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY.

THE COLLECT.

ALMIGHTY and everlasting God, who art always more ready to hear than we to pray, and art wont to give more than either we desire or deserve *; Pour down upon us the abundance of thy mercy, forgiving us those things whereof our conscience is afraid, and giving us those good things which we are not worthy to ask, but through the merits and mediation of Jesus Christ thy Son our Lord. Amen.

THE EPISTLE. 2 Cor. iii. 4.

4 *Such trust have we through Christ to God-ward :*

5 *Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think anything as of ourselves ; but our sufficiency is of God ;*

6 *Who also hath made us able ministers of the new testament ; not of the letter, but of the spirit : for the letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life.*

declare men's duty, but assist them in it. the former only, left men obnoxious to death ; but the gospel, which entitles them to the graces of God's Spirit, does thereby entitle them to life eternal.

7 *But if the ministration of death, written and engraven in stones, was glorious, so that the children of Israel could not stedfastly behold the face of Moses for the glory of his countenance ; which glory was to be done away :*

the ministry of it, though such as were it could not deliver from death.

8 *How shall not the ministration of the spirit be rather glorious ?*

9 *For if the ministration of condemnation be glory, much more doth the ministration of righteousness exceed in glory.*

the gospel is : which does not leave men in guilt and death, but brings pardon and life and grace, and helps men to do as well as to know their duty ; and which, upon these accounts, is the ministration (the only ministration) of the Spirit and of righteousness ?

4, 5. The trust we have of our ministry being effectual is in God, and in those abilities which he for Christ's sake gives us to

this purpose, not upon any of our own.

6. It is he that animates and blesses our labours in propagating this new covenant, which does not only

For the law, which did the

7. That law was written in stones only, because only helping men in the knowledge of God's will : and yet God gave very significant intimations of his favour to not to continue, and though

8, 9. Is it not reasonable then to think that he will more signally favour the ministry of a dispensation so much more beneficial, as

the gospel is : which does not leave men in guilt and death, but brings pardon and life and grace, and helps men to do as well as to know their duty ; and which, upon these accounts, is the ministration (the only ministration) of the Spirit and of righteousness ?

COMMENT.

The apostle^b, having with great satisfaction mentioned the marvellous efficacy and success which attended the preaching of the gospel, as in other places, and by the rest of his brethren and fellow-labourers, so particularly by himself and in regard of these Corinthians^c, does, at the beginning of this scripture now in hand, declare his firm belief and expectation of the continuance and increase of that efficacy and success. Whereby, lest any should suspect that he arrogated too much to himself, he declares this confidence to be entirely fixed upon God^d, for the sake and merits of Jesus Christ; that the conversion of men to the true faith is an undertaking to which the wit and parts, the learning and labour of men, even when best accomplished to persuade, is in no degree equal; and that these are events entirely owing to the Spirit of God^e, partly by his extraordinary operations enabling the ministers of the new testament to make the most convincing evidence of, and partly by his ordinary and assisting graces disposing the minds of their hearers to embrace the truths of the gospel. All which he confirms with this farther argument for his trust; that such assistances of the Holy Spirit, and the successes proportionable to them, might be depended upon in favour and for the promotion of the gospel; because the promise of that Spirit is a privilege peculiar to the gospel, and such as no other dispensation, not even that of the law of Moses, ever covenanted for^f. And upon that head St. Paul enlarges, to shew the difference between these two dispensations, and the just preeminence of the evangelical above the legal, with regard to this privilege in particular.

Such is the design and true import of the Epistle for the day, of which it shall be my endeavour to make some profitable improvement by the following remarks:

1. First, the pattern set us here by St. Paul is a good instruction both to teachers and hearers, to what cause the successful pains of the former, and the conviction and obedience of the latter, are of right to be ascribed. That both the one and the other, I mean, are entirely owing to the grace and good Spirit of God.

The insufficiency of *ourselves to think anything as of ourselves*, acknowledged by the apostle in his name and that of his fellow-workers in the propagation of the gospel, does manifestly relate to this matter, of bringing men over to the faith by the force of human art and reasoning. An attempt which they of all men living were farthest from being qualified for, because visibly destitute both of those natural and acquired accomplishments which are fitted to work such an effect. The defects therefore both of parts and study were to them abundantly supplied and compensated by such miraculous inspirations and powers as are called with great propriety of speech *the demonstration of the Spirit*^g, because they could come from none but God. And these, allowing them to come from him, were proofs that God was in the cause they promoted and confirmed, and that he

^b Chap. ii. 14 to ch. iii. 3.^c Ver. 4.^d Ver. 5.^e Ver. 6.^f Ver. 6, 7, 8, &c.^g 1 Cor. ii. 4.

approved the persons endued with them as acting for his service and by his commission.

These were operations and effects accommodated to the circumstances of a religion as yet unsettled. But though the condition of it, as now received and established, have rendered the continuance of them needless to succeeding ages, yet, wheresoever we see the same effect, it certainly proceeds from the same cause, though working in a manner less apparent and surprising. For there is a corrupt principle of flesh and sense in the breast of every man, too obstinate for reason alone to deal with: and much more likely to pervert and draw that over, than to hearken to and be won by it. Nothing will find itself a match for this less than a contrary principle superior to nature; by which, our minds receiving a new turn, nature may find itself conquered and corrected, and a fair hearing may be obtained for those arguments which would establish the spiritual part in its just government over the sensual, and place the promises of happiness to the soul in higher esteem than any worldly profits or pleasures of the body. This indeed, in the ordinary methods of acting, is done by so secret and gentle a concurrence of God's Spirit with ours, that all might seem to be the sole result of our own reason, did not both Scripture and experience testify that, albeit the manner of working be undiscernible, yet the work itself can be none but God's. For we know that *in us, that is, in our flesh, dwelleth no good thing*^b; and therefore, when we will and act any thing that is good, this cannot be from those inclinations of our own, which stand bent the contrary way, but from some cause overruling and altering those inclinationsⁱ. And this is such a change and overruling as is really worthy the power of God. For what power less than his can thus turn the hearts of rational agents, and yet leave them in the exercise of their native choice? This is a more glorious and, when well considered, a more wonderful act of omnipotency than any exerted upon dead and senseless matter. And our church shews that she hath well considered it, by beginning the daily prayer which begs his blessing and grace upon the clergy and their congregations with this very significant compellation: *Almighty and everlasting God, who alone workst great marvels, send down &c. the healthful Spirit of thy grace, &c.* It is this which, by producing holy and spiritual effects, approves himself not only an holy, but an almighty Spirit. It is this which enables us to understand and labour and teach rightly, diligently, and profitably; it is this disposes you to hear and read attentively, to consider and judge impartially, to believe and obey conscientiously, to persevere steadfastly. The beginning, the progress, the finishing of all our virtues are owing to this principle: and without it, all the most accurate reasonings are like seed sown upon the sand: for till grace have prepared the soil, no good thing can take root. And in every kindly growth of this nature, neither therefore to the planter, nor the waterer, nor the person planted or watered, is the praise and the product due, but solely to God, who giveth the increase^k.

This grace St. Paul, in the passage now before us, asserts to be a privilege peculiar to Christians; and upon that account contends

^b Rom. vii. 18.

ⁱ John iii. 6.

^k 1 Cor. iii. 6, 7.

for the glory and excellence of the gospel so far above that of the law, as to represent that foregoing perfectly eclipsed by the surpassing brightness of this subsequent dispensation. To this purpose he styles the law *the letter*¹, but the gospel *the spirit*²; he affirms of the law, that it *killeth*, and is *the ministration of death and condemnation*; of the gospel, that it *giveth life*, and calls it *the ministration of the Spirit and of righteousness*. He infers, lastly, that the glory of the latter must needs exceed the glory of the former: both upon the account of its effects, which are more beneficial³, and upon the account of its duration; for that is *done away*, but *this remaineth*⁴. These particulars deserve a little consideration.

1. First, let us observe the different titles given to the law and the gospel, and the reason of that difference, *the letter* and *the spirit*. The apostle hath, I think, sufficiently explained his meaning, and the significance of these titles, in this very chapter; by telling us, that the law was *written and engraven in stones*⁵, that is, in the two tables brought down by Moses out of mount Horeb, where God had detained him forty days and nights together⁶. The use whereof to the Israelites extended no farther than merely a declaration of their duty, together with the sanctions and penalties, and what would be the consequences of performing or transgressing it. On the other hand, the gospel is *the spirit*, because *written not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God*; *not in tables of stone, but in fleshy tables of the heart*⁷. To understand the true force of that phrase *fleshy tables*, let it be remembered that God by the prophet Ezekiel promises to his people as a signal blessing, that he will *take away the stony heart out of their flesh, and will give them an heart of flesh*⁸. And by Jeremiah, that he will *put his law in their inward parts, and will write it in their hearts, and he will be their God, and they shall be his people*⁹. The former promise imports a cure of their obstinacy, and bringing them to a temper sensible and tender, and fit to receive good impressions; the latter denotes sufficient information in and a good liking to their duty. And thus the gospel here is called *the spirit*, because conveying to believers such illuminations and graces of the Holy Ghost as do not only enable them to know, but dispose them to love and to practise that which it commands.

Some indeed there are who have thought this title given it because of that spiritual nature and purity and substantial holiness enjoined there; so opposing it to the Levitical and ritual law, which they supposed termed *the letter*, because the services and ceremonies of it had no intrinsic worth to recommend them, nor any consideration for inducing men to obedience, but purely their being the commands of God, or, as we may say, *the letter of the law*. But I think it exceeding plain, that this could not be St. Paul's sense of the matter; because *the letter* at the sixth, and *the ministration written and engraven* in the seventh verse, are one and the same. But the history of Moses is express, that the writing of God in the two tables of

¹ 2 Cor. iii. 6.
⁴ Exod. xxiv, xxxiv.

² m Ver. 7, 8, 9.
³ 2 Cor. iii. 3.

⁵ n Ver. 9, 10.
⁶ Ezek. xl. 19, xxxvi. 26.

⁷ o Ver. 11.
⁸ p Ver. 7.
⁹ Jer. xxxi. 33.

stone was only the Ten Commandments, or moral law^u. Now this letter does certainly contain and virtually enjoin the same substantial holiness and spiritual purity as the gospel. So that the difference truly lies in this, that *the letter*, in requiring them, left men to their natural powers; but *the Spirit* does not only require them, but assist and enable men with grace for the discharge of them.

2. This explanation ministers some light into the second difference here taken notice of, consisting in the different effects of those dispensations. The declared punishment of sin is death. Consequently the more precepts are multiplied, the more obnoxious to death the persons obliged by them become; for all sin is the transgression of some law. Now *the letter* is therefore said to *kill*, to *minister death* and *condemnation*, and the like, because it enacted commandments, and brought men to a conscience of their guilt for things which, in the corrupt state of nature, they were in no condition of escaping by their own strength. It propounded duties in themselves spiritual and good; it prohibited practices sensual and evil; but the parties living under it were carnal and enslaved to sin: thus it was not the intent, but the accidental consequence of the law, to minister to death and condemnation. The true cause was men's own wickedness and weakness. For this the law provided no remedy; for that it promised no pardon; and it is therefore said to kill those whom it left liable to die. But (as St. Chrysostom well observes upon the place) the law is not to be blamed; for when the malefactor suffers, though the judge, the evidence, the executioner, and the statute upon which he is tried and convicted, be each in their degree and manner instruments and occasions, yet himself and the crime he suffers for are strictly and properly the sole cause of his death. All which agrees punctually with the account of this matter reasoned at large in the seventh chapter to the Romans.

The gospel again is said to *give life*, to be the ministration of the *Spirit* and of *righteousness*. Which effects have all three a natural and necessary dependence upon each other. Death, as was just now argued, follows from sin as its meritorious cause. To this therefore every man is liable, and in the eye of the law actually dead, while guilt continues upon him. Now the gospel, by promising pardon to the sinner, absolves him from that sentence; and this is the justifying grace of the gospel, called here *the ministration of righteousness*, as opposed to *condemnation*^x. But the frailty of nature not being able to sustain itself, the same penalty and misery must needs return by reason of daily sins and infirmities. And therefore here again the gospel relieves us by the communications of sanctifying grace; in which respect it is called *the ministration of the Spirit*, as inclining and enabling us to please God; opposed to *the ministration of death written in stones*^y, which only acquainted men what would please God, but contributed nothing at all either to the disposition or power of doing it. A necessary consequence of these two sorts of grace received and continued in, is, a right to immortality; that being entirely done away which made such persons capable of dying. And therefore this *spirit*,

^u Compare Exod. xxiv, xxxiv. and Deut. x.

^x Ver. 9.

^y Ver. 7.

as a sure pledge of resurrection to endless bliss, is said to *give life*^a; in opposition to that *letter*, which in effect *killeth* those whom it condemns to death for disobedience, and yet leaves in a helpless state, without any remission for past or prevention against future disobedience.

By this time it appears how properly that gospel is styled *the spirit*, to the believers whereof the promises of the Holy Spirit and his assistances do of right belong. The persons baptized into this faith are said to be *born again of water and of the Spirit*^a; to have *power* in virtue of that second birth *to become the sons of God*^b; to receive *the spirit of adoption*^c, as a mark and sure testimony of that filial relation to him; to *walk in the Spirit*^d, to be *led by the Spirit*, to be *quickened by the Spirit*^e, to be *raised from the dead by the Spirit*, and in the mean while to be *sealed with that Spirit* (which is very emphatically called *the Spirit of promise*, because indented for in this gospel-covenant) *as an earnest of their future inheritance*^f. These, and a great number of texts besides, leave us no reasonable grounds of doubt whether the ordinary graces of the Holy Spirit be not a gospel-privilege. And it is very remarkable, that the extraordinary and miraculous gifts are frequently affirmed to be such likewise. Thus, in his first miraculous effusion on the day of Pentecost, St. Peter argues that event to have been the just accomplishment of Joel's prophecy; who, speaking of *the last days*^g (the days of the Messiah), mentions, as an eminent prerogative of that time, that God would then *pour out of his Spirit upon all flesh*. And with reference to the conversion of Cornelius and his company, he urges their speaking with tongues as an evidence that God had accepted them and *purified their hearts by faith*^h; by virtue whereof they had obtained this privilege, notwithstanding they never submitted to the rites of the law, and consequently could not impute any part of this benefit to that legal, but must owe it entirely to the Christian dispensation. Thus again St. Paul, in the scripture now at hand, refers to those supernatural and powerful operations, as given to make the planters of this faith *able ministers of the new testament*. And, reproaching the folly of his Galatians for returning to the bondage of the law, he uses this very observable expostulation: *This only would I learn of you, Received ye the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith?*ⁱ And again, (to shew what gifts and operations of the Spirit he means,) *He that ministereth to you the Spirit, and worketh miracles among you, doeth he it by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith?*^k

From hence it is sufficiently clear, that the graces of the Holy Spirit, in any acceptation whatsoever, are a gospel-privilege. But whether a privilege in common to it with or exclusive of all other dispensations, and peculiar to this alone, is an inquiry that still remains, and is necessary to be considered. The rather, because nothing less than its being such in this latter sense is sufficient to bear St. Paul out in bestowing upon it the title of *spirit*. The same may be said

^a Ver. 6. ^b John iii. 5; I. 12, 13.

^c Gal. iv. 6; Rom. viii. 15.

^d Gal. v. 16.

^e Rom. viii. 14; Gal. v. 18.

^f Rom. viii. 11.

^g Ephes. i. 13, 14.

^h Acts ii. 16, 17.

ⁱ Compare Acts x. 46; xi. 15, 16, 17; xv. 8, 9.

^j Gal. iii. 2.

^k Ver. 5.

of the other distinctions here; which are not only invidious and disparaging, but a great indignity and wrong done to the law, if that were really more than a bare letter, and entitled the persons living under it to any, though more sparing, communications of the same Spirit. Of which I own there may be thought these two probable appearances: first, that some promises of this kind are manifestly contained in the Old Testament; and secondly, that we find many instances of persons conducted and acted by this Spirit of God long before our Saviour's time and the preaching of his gospel. Now, though some things said to this purpose heretofore might, if carefully attended to, suffice to clear these difficulties, yet I shall upon this occasion consider the point a little more distinctly, and give as perspicuous a state of it as I can¹.

In order hereunto, I desire special notice may be taken that the covenant with God in Christ was made with our lapsed parents immediately after their fall; that this covenant in substance hath been always one and the same; the general terms of it consisting in a Saviour to take away sin, and all the pernicious consequences of it, on God's part; and in faith and obedience on man's part. That the methods of applying salvation have indeed been different, as have likewise the manner of exhibiting this Saviour, and the instances of exercising that faith and obedience; but whether we regard the more simple worship of the patriarchs, or the promulgation of the moral law, or the ceremonies of the Levitical, or the explicit belief of the gospel; still the author of salvation, and the object and end of faith to every man, hath all along been *Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever*^m. In him alone men obtain remission of sins and eternal life: and whatever dispensations have intervoned, they have been all concurrent with and subservient to this grand and general one. None, taken apart from this, can be of any avail for spiritual and immortal benefits, but only as including, prefiguring, and leading to that Saviour. These things are proved at large by St. Paul in his Epistles to the Romans and Galatians; from the lost and impotent condition of mankind in general, from the dealings of God with Abraham in particular. And in the Epistle to the Hebrews, from the insufficiency of all legal sacrifices, and the universal efficacy of Christ's one meritorious sacrifice; from the typical nature and design of the ritual economy of the Jews; and particularly from faith being the only principle of pleasing God, proved by an induction of instances in the most eminent saints throughout all ages of the world. From whence it is that our Lord and his apostles so often appeal to the evidences of the Old Testament, declaring they taught nothing disagreeable to, but only perfective of these; and in one word, that the preaching of the gospel is styled a *manifestation of that righteousness of God without the law, which is witnessed by the law and the prophets*ⁿ.

Upon these grounds duly considered we shall find no great difficulty to justify the preeminence ascribed to the gospel here, in bar to any other dispensation whatsoever.

I. For, first, be it, as indeed it must be, confessed, that there are

¹ See Epist. S. after Christm. Circumcisa. S. IV. in Lent. ^m Heb. xiii. 8. ⁿ Rom. iii. 21.

several promises of the Spirit of grace in the Old Testament. These are frequently to be met with in the prophetic writings, nor are they wanting even in Moses himself; for he also foretells and promises, *God shall circumcise thy heart, and the heart of thy seed, to love the Lord thy God with all thine heart and with all thy soul, that thou mayest live*^o. This circumcision of the heart is certainly an operation and effect of which none but the Spirit of God is capable. But this is no effect contracted for by the covenant made in Horeb; for of that and their behaviour under it Moses had said, but a little before, *The Lord hath not given you an heart to perceive, and eyes to see, and ears to hear, unto this day*^p. In short, neither the moral nor the ceremonial law contains the least tittle of a promise of inward grace; and therefore, however any such may be found in the writings of the Old Testament, yet were they not branches of the legal, but properly belonged to the evangelical dispensation; though very fitly interspersed in Moses and the prophets, to shew that even this dispensation, of which they are a part, was then in force. And accordingly the apostle contends that Moses is there *describing the righteousness which is of faith*^q. And the author to the Hebrews^r proves that famous passage in Jeremiah, *I will write my laws in their hearts, &c.*, to be a covenant altogether distinct from that made with Israel at their coming out of Egypt. Nay, and even the Jewish interpreters themselves do not scruple to own that these are descriptions and prophecies which point at the days and kingdom of the Messiah.

2. So that, secondly, although several, and indeed all good persons were made partakers of this Spirit heretofore, yet does not this overthrow St. Paul's argument. He never intended to deny that any under the law had this Spirit communicated to them; but his meaning is, that none, no not even they who had it under the law, had it by virtue of the law. He affirms that the Spirit alone gives life: are we to infer from thence that all who lived under the letter died and perished in their sins? By no means. But thus much is implied by it; that as many as then obtained remission of sins and eternal life did owe those benefits, not to the law, but to the covenant of God in Christ, which in all ages took effect on the children of faith and obedience. And consequently, that what was defective in that law and in human nature did in every age receive a supply from this gospel-covenant, which hath continued in all these saving effects the same from the beginning, and shall do so to the end of the world.

Meanwhile God hath not been wanting in several instances to give undeniable proofs of this matter. As particularly, (1.) In the more liberal effusions of this Spirit since the publication of this gospel, of which it is so glorious an appendage. There being no comparison between either its miraculous powers or its sanctifying graces, as they were dealt before and as they have been poured out since our blessed Saviour's death. (2.) In the total loss of them to the Jews. For the ceasing of prophecy and miracles among them, even before the birth of Christ, shews the extraordinary, and their incorrigible obstinacy and blindness prove the ordinary, graces of the Holy Spirit to have for-

^o Deut. xix. 6.^p Deut. xix. 4.^q Rom. x. 6.^r Heb. viii. 7, 8, 9, 10, &c.

saken them. And consequently his influences of both sorts are such as the synagogue had no right to, nor that covenant or law any hand in procuring, which distinguishes their synagogue from the church of Christ. So that *the letter*, which at no time was able to give life to others, is now, and for a long time hath been, no better than a dead one itself. And this leads me to say somewhat concerning the two reasons given by St. Paul for the gospel excelling the law in glory: the one, because its effects are more beneficial; the other, because its continuance is more durable. Of which very briefly.

By this glory we may understand, either in general the excellence of the Christian religion, and the honour and esteem due to it upon that account; or more particularly, with regard to that confidence of success expressed here by St. Paul, the signal appearances of Almighty God in its favour.

In the former sense the Christian excels all other religions, because, as hath been shewn, conveying to its professors benefits of incomparably greater value. For to this alone we are indebted for the pardon of our sins, for the renewing of our nature, for all the spiritual comforts and advantages of this life, and for the undoubted assurance and inconceivable happiness of another. Blessings with which all the temporal prosperities contracted for by the law are not worthy to be named. Nor is it a small inducement to our highest esteem, that God hath thought fit to make this an everlasting covenant. For that perpetuity plainly intimates its perfections. And, as the apostle reasons, that *if the first covenant had been faultless, there would have been no mention of a second*, and that the Levitical priesthood was abolished *for the weakness and unprofitableness thereof*¹. So by continuing this gospel-covenant from the beginning to the end of the world, is evidently implied its usefulness and sufficiency for all the noble purposes intended to be served by it; and that this is not to be succeeded by any other, because it is not possible there should be any better.

In the latter sense it must needs excel likewise, because the salvation of mankind is of all things most agreeable to the father and lover of souls—the very end he had in view from the institution of this covenant, and the noblest work of his incomprehensible goodness and mercy: and therefore so long as there are souls to be saved, so long as a state of discipline and improvement lasts, his honour will be concerned to promote and preserve a dispensation necessary for the accomplishment of that gracious design. And indeed his wisdom can never be sufficiently admired and adored, for the wonderful contrivance at the first, for the management of the different administrations subordinate and preparatory to it, for the sending his own blessed Son in the fulness of time to publish it by his doctrine and to ratify it by his blood, for the astonishing powers of his Holy Spirit to confirm it by miracles, for the graces of that Spirit exemplified in the lives and deaths of martyrs and saints innumerable, for the wonderful propagations and establishment of it by methods of meekness and patience, for the protection of it from the malice of persecutors and the artifices of heretics; and for his gracious promise, of the per-

¹ Heb. viii.

formance whereof so many past experiments are most comfortable pledges, that *the gates of hell shall never prevail against it*. Lord, give us grace seriously to consider, heartily to be thankful for, conscientiously to improve, and to live worthy of our advantages; that we, who call ourselves Christians, may be so much more thy people in all holy obedience, as thou art so much more our God in the distinctions of thy bounty and favour, than any others that were ever called by thy name! So, as thou vouchsafest at present to *guide us by the counsel*† of thy Spirit, shalt thou advance us from grace to grace, and after that *receive us into glory*, for his sake, who *through the blood of the everlasting covenant* purchased both grace and glory for all them who walk no longer in the *oldness of the letter*, but in the *newness of the spirit*; thy dear Son, Jesus Christ. To whom, &c.

THE GOSPEL. St. Mark vii. 31.

31 *And again, departing from the coasts of Tyre and Sidon, he came unto the sea of Galilee, through the midst of the coasts of Decapolis.*

32 *And they bring unto him one that was deaf, and had an *impediment in his speech; and they beseech him to put his hand upon him.*

33 *And he took him aside from the multitude, and put his fingers into his ears, and he spit, and touched his tongue;*

34 *And looking up to heaven, he sighed, and saith unto him, Ephphatha, that is, Be opened.*

35 *And straightway his ears were opened, and the string of his tongue was loosed, and he spake plain.*

36 *And he charged them that they should tell no man: but the more he charged them, so much the more a great deal they published it;*

37 *And were beyond measure astonished, saying, † He hath done all things well: he maketh both the deaf to hear, and the dumb to speak.*

32. *A deaf and dumb person, that (as the manner of blessing any one was) he might lay his hands upon him.

33. By these bodily actions signifying the application of his divine power to the parts so touched.

37. † Why is this man ill spoken of, who thus in all points answers the character of a mighty prophet, by his miraculous power? *making, &c.*

COMMENT.

The subject I intend to insist upon at present is contained in the thirty-sixth verse; where we read that our Lord, having gratified the

† Psalm lxxiii.

friends of this deaf and dumb man, in a miraculous cure performed at their request, *charged them that no man should know it; but the more he charged them, so much the more a great deal they published it.*

Now from hence I shall take occasion,

I. First, to inquire what reasons probably might move our blessed Saviour to forbid the divulging this and some other of his miracles, as we find he frequently did.

II. Secondly, to consider the carriage of those people who took the liberty to disobey this command. And,

III. Lastly, to propose some useful reflections, which the foregoing heads will naturally suggest to us.

1. First, the reasons inducing our Lord to forbid the divulging this and some other miracles might probably be these that follow:

1. To decline as much as was possible the envy and opposition of the Pharisees. He did not only *know what was in man*^u, and consequently what entertainment each of his actions would meet with, but had by many experiments found how these men in particular stood affected towards him. He saw them so far from any disposition to improve by fresh demonstrations of his divine power, that these did but add to their guilt, and provoked them to blasphemy and rage. The construction they made of such miraculous recoveries was, that he dispossessed devils by a good understanding and secret collusion *with the prince of the devils*^x. This point he sometimes vouchsafed to argue with them, and exposed the unreasonableness and absurdity of such malice; but this gave him great interruption in his main work, and engaged him in contests disagreeable to the peacefulness of his temper; for which reason he chose often to retire quietly, rather than enter into contentious disputes in his own justification. And that this was a part necessary in his character we have St. Matthew's authority, on an occasion like this now in hand: *When Jesus had withdrawn himself from the Pharisees, great multitudes followed him, and he healed them all; but charged them that they should not make him known: that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Esaias the prophet, saying, Behold my servant, whom I have chosen; my beloved, in whom my soul is well pleased: I will put my spirit upon him, and he shall show judgment to the Gentiles. He shall not strive, nor cry; neither shall any man hear his voice in the streets*^y. So that, though our Lord could have confuted the folly and malice of his slanderers, yet it was more for his purpose to conceal some evidences of his power, than to provoke them to be troublesome by making it public.

2. But neither was envy and contradiction all he had to avoid. For those enemies did not only blaspheme his person, but attempt upon his life. The Son of God indeed came into the world with a purpose to die; but the scheme laid by the Divine wisdom had ordained a course of many things before and in order to his dying. He could also by his almighty power have defeated their wicked conspiracies, and borne down their utmost force^z; (as he afterwards made appear in the garden, by striking them to the ground with a word of his mouth, who came to apprehend him;) but this was not a proper

^u John ii. 25.

^x Matt. xii. 24.

^y Matt. xii. 15—19.

^z John xviii.

season for exerting that power. The truth of his human nature was now to be attested; and his appearance at present being that of a mere man, the same methods of prudent care were fit to be taken, by which common men in like cases are wont to preserve themselves. Hence he passed from them, when inflamed; withdrew to the Gentiles; deferred his journeys to Jerusalem; went secretly up to the feast; made his escape beyond Jordan; and drew out his retreat there to a considerable length^a. By all this provident and meek behaviour, he declined the occasions of irritating his angry enemies, not from a dread of dying, so much as from a care to reserve himself for the exercise of his prophetic office, till it was proper for that of his priestly one to commence, and to put a period to the teaching part by offering himself a sacrifice upon the cross.

3. A third probable reason of this concealment might be to prevent any sedition or tumults among the people. The common notions of the Messiah at that time are sufficiently known; and, as it could not become our Saviour to countenance those errors, so neither could it, by rendering himself suspected to the government, to give his adversaries the advantage they desired. Now every thing that contributed to their belief of his being the Messiah, would be a temptation to desert their established governors, and put themselves under his protection, as ordained by God to be their rightful king and victorious deliverer. Hence it is likely the disciples are forbidden to declare him the Christ till he should be risen from the dead^b; as well as because the miraculous effusion of the Holy Ghost was a requisite qualification for bearing that testimony effectually. For what the effect of such a persuasion would have been, is easy to be gathered from one instance, which I look upon as a sufficient justification of the argument I am urging. It is St. John's account of our Lord's behaviour, and the inducement to it, after feeding *five thousand with five barley loaves and two small fishes*. Then those men, (says the evangelist,) *when they had seen the miracle that Jesus did, said, This is of a truth that prophet that should come into the world*^c. A phrase well understood to denote the expected Messiah. Whereupon immediately follows, *When Jesus therefore perceived that they would come and take him by force to make him a king, he departed again into a mountain himself alone*^d.

It may possibly add some force to these arguments to observe, that in places where the like consequences could not be apprehended, our Lord was not so much upon the reserve. Himself told the woman of Samaria that he was the Christ^e; and suffered the seamen to worship him as such without any injunction of silence^f; and after dispossessing the demoniac called *Legion*, even commanded him to go home to his friends, and tell them how great things the Lord had done for him^g. So that in this matter one thing which seems always to be had in view, was, the effect like to follow upon the publication or suppression

^a Luke ix. 30; John viii. 59; Mark iii. 7; John viii. 1, 10; John x. 39, 40; xl. 53, 54.

^b Matt. xvi. 20.

^c John vi. 14.

^d Ver. 15.

^e John iv.

^f Matt. xiv. 33.

^g Mark v. 19.

of his mighty works, to the purposes that have been here insisted upon.

4. But I make no doubt another reason for our Lord's conduct in this matter was, that he might set us an example of humility, and of doing good for good's sake. He had directed his disciples to content themselves with the knowledge and approbation of God, and the inward satisfactions of having discharged their duty^b; that they should consider they serve one who sees in secret, and who will one day shew that he knows and remembers their good deeds by rewarding them openly. As therefore in other instances of virtue, so here, our Lord approves himself a pattern and practiser of his own doctrine, by not courting the fame and praise of men, and so clearing his behaviour from all suspicion of vanity. What other hidden causes there might be for such commands of secrecy is best known to the infinite wisdom of him who gave them; but to us these are sufficient. Let us therefore now proceed to the

II. Second head, and consider the behaviour of the parties commanded, as those words describe it, *But the more he charged them, so much the more a great deal they published it*. Great arguing there hath been whether these persons sinned or not, in so officiously divulging what our Saviour so industriously laboured to conceal. They who condemn them ground their severity upon a notion that every precept from the mouth of Christ was strictly obligatory to the conscience. Others, more favourable, bear a great regard to (that *οικονομία*, as the Fathers are used to express it) that manner and management which in prudence became him, while acting, to outward appearance, as a common man. These think his divine authority as well as his divine essence to be purposely veiled from vulgar eyes; and presume, that he is not always to be looked upon in the quality of a lawgiver; but comporting himself as wisdom and goodness would move a private person to do in the like circumstances. As therefore a generous friend may desire not to have his favours blazed abroad to shew that he acted upon principles of kindness and virtue, without any view of popularity and applause; and yet the party obliged may esteem it his duty to let the world know his particular engagements and the bounty of his benefactor; so our blessed Lord (it hath been conceived) might order the suppressing this miracle in silence, and so do what well became him as a giver^c; and yet these persons might proclaim it notwithstanding, as a testimony of that gratitude which otherwise they apprehended they should be wanting in; and so consider what became them to do as receivers.

Some reasons for this injunction have indeed been alleged, wherein our Lord's own quiet and safety were concerned: and so this officious way of thanking him may be thought an unseasonable and ill return, which, by pretending respect, drew him into manifest danger and inconvenience. But this, I think, cannot affect the case in hand. For if those were reasons to Christ, they were reasons reserved to himself. Had they been communicated, then disobedience had been treachery

^b Matt. vi.

^c See Chrysostom on Matt. viii.

and villainy, and a blacker ingratitude they could not have been guilty of, than by thus rendering his mercy and their benefit a snare to him. But in regard they in all likelihood imputed that command purely to his modesty, they thought themselves at liberty to disobey it. Let it therefore be considered, whether those Fathers and interpreters have not accounted reasonably for this action: who from hence call upon us to observe, on the one hand, what care our Lord took to decline all suspicion of pride and popularity; on the other, what pains they took to proclaim his goodness and power; not with an intent to slight or act contrary to his order, but purely to express their gratitude, and an honest zeal for his praise and honour. For that the advancement of his honour was intended, is plain from the levelling their commendations directly against the malicious insinuations of his slanderers and detractors. To which purpose the thirty-seventh verse informs us, that their publication was to this effect: *He hath done all things well; he maketh both the deaf to hear and the dumb to speak.*

I have enlarged the rather on this subject, thereby to give some light to several other passages of Scripture, much of the like importance. Otherwise, to say the truth, it cannot be of any mighty moment to us, whether these persons acquitted themselves well or ill in this affair. To their own Master therefore let them stand or fall: while we attend to that which more properly concerns us; some moral reflections, I mean, which it was my promise to raise from the foregoing particulars, as the

III. Third and last head of this discourse.

1. And, first, we shall do well from hence to observe our engagements, to let the world know how deeply we are indebted to Almighty God for his mercies. Of the duty of thankfulness in general I purpose to treat hereafter; my present design is to shew that we are bound to make our thanks public. And this is plainly to be gathered from these persons thinking it an injury to our Lord's goodness to bury it in silence, and their obligation to extol it so indispensable, that even a peremptory command to the contrary was not sufficient to excuse their omitting so to do. If they must seem to offend, they chose this as the more pardonable way; and preferred the breach of a particular injunction before that of gratitude in general, which nature had dictated to all mankind. This example will render us past all excuse, if we, who lie under no such command of secrecy, should disingenuously (as David speaks) *hide God's righteousness within our heart, and keep back his mercy and truth from the great congregation*¹: if we do not *enter into his gates with thanksgiving, and come into his courts with praise*¹: if we do not express our thankfulness by *speaking good of his name, and pay our vows in the presence of all his people*². Thus we are called upon, *O praise our God, ye people, and make the voice of his praise to be heard*³, to signify that the affections and the heart and the devotions of the closet are too narrow; and (as we confess in our Communion Service) *how very meet and right, and our bounden duty it is, that we should at all times and in all places give thanks unto the Lord.* The exhortation with which our daily public worship begins assigns

¹ Psalm xl. 10.

¹ Psalm c. 3.

² Psalm cxvi. 12.

³ Psalm lvi. 8.

this as the first of those purposes for which we assemble solemnly, *to render thanks for the great benefits we have received at God's hands, and to set forth his most worthy praise.* And upon this occasion I think it proper to take notice of one defect very general among us. In sickness or sorrow, or any calamity or distress, we are directed to call in the public prayers of the church to our relief. This is too seldom and too slightly done. But even of them who do it, how few obey the other part of the church's order, by making their thanks for deliverance equally public. Which yet ought by all means to be done, that the same collective body may acknowledge the goodness of God in hearing and answering their prayers: that they may address to him with fervency and faith upon all like occasions; and that the parties relieved, and every other member, may have a worthy esteem of the force and efficacy of such public and united intercessions. All which are reasons of so great importance, and so directly in the church's favour; that the rubric plainly restrains the right and use of a particular thanksgiving ^a to such as *have been prayed for and desire to return praise.*

2. As their example who spread the fame and miracles of our Lord teaches us public gratitude, so does his who forbade this forbid us ostentation and seeking the esteem and admiration of men. By *seeking* I mean making it the principal aim of our actions; than which there cannot be a greater dishonour to God or a more fatal snare to our own souls.

(1.) The former, because this were in effect to make now masters to ourselves, and by a base degeneracy of spirit to become slaves to our fellow-servants. For are the best and highest of mortals any better? Are we not all subject to the same laws, and accountable to the same Judge? We run the Christian race, not to gain acclamations from the spectators, but to gain favour and acceptance from the Giver of the prize. There is enough, and more than enough, to beget in us a just and generous indifference for the applause of men, upon many other accounts; but the most unanswerable argument is, that howsoever it may please us in this world, it cannot profit us one whit in the next. And how wretched must their disappointment needs be, who discover too late that they have taken abundance of pains to none or very ill purpose; and instead of that solid reward they ought to have pursued, have taken up with a little empty breath, of no more substance than the air we draw, nor of longer duration than the sound it gave!

(2.) But that is not the worst of it; for St. Paul, expressing his detestation of popularity, says, with indignation, *Do I seek to please men? for if I yet pleased men, I should not be the servant of Christ* ^p. This, it seems, is one of the masters that cannot be served with God; and, in truth, no temptation is more dangerous or destructive of true piety. The pertinacious unbelief of the Pharisees our Lord himself imputes to their *loving the praise of men more than the praise of God* ^q; and the impossibility of their taking any good impressions to *receiving honour one of another, and not seeking the honour that cometh from God only* ^r. This brings real virtue into disesteem, and puts men upon doing well,

^a See General Thanksgiving.

^p Gal. i. 10.

^q John xii. 43.

^r John v. 44.

not from the satisfactions of a good principle and a good conscience, but from the glory and reputation that attend it; and they who for this reason are moved to virtue, if vice come into credit, will without great difficulty go over to that for the same reason. This sets open the door to hypocrisy, and banishes sincerity and truth; and then, by affecting to impose upon others, the cheat comes round at last, and we by degrees impose upon ourselves. For it is but too frequent to take in common fame to the judgments of our own state, and to imagine ourselves very good when the world thinks and calls us so. In a word, affectation of praise debases the soul, corrupts the noblest undertakings, chains men down to the worst of slavery, and, after infinite trouble, generally defrauds them even of that poor little recompense they so greedily hunt after: for (which is my

3. Third and last reflection) the true way to secure the honour and esteem of men is to decline it when we best deserve it. Such was the event of our Lord's humility here; it even added to his renown: for *the more he charged them to tell no man, so much the more a great deal they published it*. Credit and commendation mankind are naturally pleased with, and therefore every one expects his share of it. But when bold and confident people thrust themselves forward, and grasp at more than fairly belongs to them; this provokes envy and resentment in others, and renders every such pretender a common enemy. For reputation is one of those good things sure to be lost by all who go about to engross it to themselves. Besides, the mean and little arts necessary for ingratiating with the world cannot pass always; and these, when detected, leave the courtiers of fame and popularity of all creatures most despicable. Let us then do things worthy of esteem and applause, and these will surely come to those who have patience to wait for them; but if snatched before their time, like unripe fruit, they will offend both the palate and the stomach. Bad as it is, the world is not yet, and we may reasonably hope never will be, so bad, but that steady, meek, and unaffected goodness will command a great deal of honour and respect. Nay, even they who have not the heart to be good themselves are seldom so wretchedly abandoned, that they should cease to love and pay some deference to persons exemplarily virtuous. Every one joins in helping modesty to its right, and this grace in particular cannot be long a loser by receding from its just claims. For there is this most desirable advantage belonging to it, (a satisfaction capable of gratifying the vainest humour,) that, if it should miss of recompense and applause at present, yet shall its deserts be one day extolled by saints and angels, be crowned with triumphs, and proclaimed with the public encomium of a whole world met together in judgment: and (which is of more worth than all the rest) they shall have the approbation of that Lord and Judge who never fails to make them large amends who prefer his honour before their own, and love and serve him from a principle of truth and sincerity. In which, and in all other instances of unaffected piety and worth, God give us grace to follow the example of his blessed Son Christ Jesus; to whom, with the Father and the Holy Spirit, be all honour and glory and praise, now and for ever. Amen.

THE THIRTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY.

THE COLLECT.

ALMIGHTY and merciful God, of whose only gift it cometh that thy faithful people do unto thee true and laudable service; Grant, we beseech thee, that we may so faithfully serve thee in this life, that we fail not finally to attain thy heavenly promises, through the merits of Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

THE EPISTLE. Galat. iii. 16.

16 *To Abraham and his seed were the promises made. He saith not, And to seeds, as of many; but as of one, And to thy seed, which is Christ.*

the benefits accruing by those promises to the one chosen seed in particular in whom all nations should be blessed. And this is Christ, and no other.

17 *And this I say, that the covenant, that was confirmed before of God in Christ, the law, which was four hundred and thirty years after, cannot disannul, that it should make the promise of none effect.*

promise by introducing a law by Moses, which did not take place till several hundred years after the promise had been in force.

18 *For if the inheritance be of the law, it is no more of promise: but God gave it to Abraham by promise.*

men by virtue of the law, or by virtue of the promise antecedent to the law. If by virtue of the law, then the promise hath nothing to do with it. But this cannot be, because it expressly contradicts the account given of it in Scripture, which positively affirms that Abraham was entitled to it by virtue of God's promise to him.

19 *Wherefore then serveth the law? It was added because of transgressions, till the seed should come to whom the promise was made; and it was ordained by angels in the hand of a mediator.*

The law was instituted afterwards for wise and weighty reasons. The ceremonial law in particular, consisting of sacrifices, &c., was given to contain the Israelites in their duty, by restraining those rites to the one true God, which they would otherwise have converted to the worship of false gods; and so to correct their proneness to idolatry, which a long conversation in Egypt had disposed them to, and which they had given a fatal experiment of in the sin of their golden calf. After which it was, and not till then, that the ritual law was imposed upon them. And therefore this law was to take place till the coming

16. The promises of justification and eternal life were made to Abraham and his seed: restraining thus

17. Hence then I argue that God, who had obliged himself by a covenant made with Abraham, could not intend to evacuate that promise

18. Either then the inheritance (that is, eternal life) must belong to good

19. To this you will possibly reply, that if it was given by the promise, then the law was to no purpose. I answer, Not so neither.

of Christ, the promised seed; but then to determine. Because the clearer knowledge of God by the gospel should then remove the danger that occasioned it; and so the promise would stand without it, as it had done before. This law was likewise promulgated by angels, and sent to the people by the hand of Moses, who sustained the character of a mediator between God and the people.

20 *Now a mediator is not a mediator of one, but God is one.* 20. Now the very office of a mediator implies, not

only two parties contracting, but some difference to be made up between the two parties. And therefore it is observable, that the law was not given immediately to the people, as the promise was immediately by God to Abraham his friend^b. Which difference could not proceed from any change in God, who is always the same, but from the men who had provoked him to treat them in another manner.

* Others thus: Now Moses was a mediator but for one part of Abraham's seed (the Israelites only); but God is but one, and so the God of all his seed in common; all that should be justified like that father of all the faithful. Dr. Hammond puts these words in the nature of an objection; urged by the adversary to prove that this mediatorship implied a covenant sufficient to justify men, and necessary to be observed for that purpose.

21 *Is the law then against the promises of God? God forbid: for if there had been a law given which could have given life, verily righteousness should have been by the law.* 21. The promise then and the law consist very well together: the former had not been necessary indeed if men could have attained to

righteousness by virtue of the law: for then the law might have superseded the promise; because whatever justifies entitles to eternal life. But the law, quite contrary, leaves men obnoxious to death; and we must by no means imagine that God intended to leave us in this miserable condition, as he must have done if the law had disannulled his promise made to Abraham.

22 *But the scripture hath concluded all under sin, that the promise by faith of Jesus Christ might be given to them that believe.* 22. So that the scripture, when declaring all to be sinners, implies, that faith in Abraham's promised seed is the means whereby all must be justified. And consequently it is to the promise, and not to the law, that we owe our salvation and eternal inheritance.

COMMENT.

THE circumstances of the Christian church in Galatia, at the time of writing this Epistle, will give us some light into the true import and design of St. Paul's argument in the words now under consideration. Now from what had gone before in this and the two other chapters, it appears that, after their conversion to the true faith, some seducing teachers had preached up the necessity of observing the Mosaical law in order to salvation. The apostle's intent was to confute and root out this dangerous error, as continuing to lay upon believers a heavy and unprofitable yoke of bondage, from which Christ

^b Bishop Bull, Grot. Vorst.

^c Dr. Whitby.

had set them free^d. This he attempts, as from other arguments, so here particularly from the incapacity that law was under for doing them any service towards obtaining remission of their sins and eternal life. The former he expresses by *righteousness*^e, the latter by *the inheritance*^f. The latter he urges was a blessing which God had covenanted for, not by the contract made with his people at mount Sinai, where the law was given; but with the father of that people, many hundred years before, when promising that in *his seed all nations should be blessed*^g. The former, he contends, is therefore to be attained by the same means, and stands suspended on the same condition still, as it was imparted to Abraham at the making of that promise. So that they who are blessed with faithful Abraham must be blessed, as he was, by faith; not by the works of the law, which he neither was nor could be, because justified four hundred and thirty years before that law was given^h.

This seems to be the thread and strength of the apostle's reasoning. In treating whereof I shall observe the following method:

1. First, I will shew what is meant here by justification, or righteousness, and what by life and inheritance.

2. Secondly, what by *faith*, which St. Paul asserts to be the condition of obtaining these. And,

3. Thirdly, I will produce some arguments for the insufficiency of the Jewish law in this matter.

1. I begin with explaining the apostle's sense of *justification*, or *righteousness*, and also of *life*, or *inheritance*, in this place.

To *justify* is a term properly belonging to processes and courts of law, and set in direct opposition to *condemnation*ⁱ. Now this, when done by God the righteous Judge, must necessarily proceed upon one of these two grounds: either, first, that the party so justified is altogether innocent, and strictly chargeable with no guilt at all; or else, secondly, that whatsoever sins he hath formerly committed, they are entirely pardoned and passed by, and can no more rise up in judgment against him than if they had never been committed at all. This person therefore, as to all acts antecedent to the time of such justification, though not actually in himself, is yet in the eye of the law, and by the forgiving mercy of the lawmaker, and to all intents and purposes of escaping the punishments awarded to such former transgressions, a righteous person.

The former of these is a felicity which never did or can belong to any mere man. For (as this and sundry other passages declare) *the scripture hath concluded all under sin*^k; and so hath left no room, no possibility, for avoiding the condemnation and punishment due to it, except by the second manner of proceeding, whereby the guilt already contracted, and the penalty incurred, are graciously overlooked and released. This was the case of Abraham, who had been educated with his father Terah in the worship of false gods, and continued many years in the practice of idolatry and superstition^l. Yet all this course of wickedness the true God in his abundant mercy pardoned, took him away

^d Gal. v. 1.

^e Gal. iii. 21.

^f Ver. 18.

^g Ver. 8.

^h Ver. 17.

ⁱ Matt. xii. 37; Rom. viii. 33, 34. 9.

^k Gal. iii. 22.

^l Joshua xxiv. 2; Gen. xii. 1.

from it, favoured him with the knowledge of himself, and of his own mere grace admitted him into covenant, and blessed him with the promise mentioned in this place. In like manner, they who are blessed and justified with Abraham have their past sins forgiven, and are qualified for a covenant-right to the promises of God, by the removing of that guilt which before subjected them to the curse. And that this is the true importance of *justification*, as generally used by St. Paul, may appear from the many equivalent expressions, such as *reconciliation* and *peace with God*—*remission of sins that are past*—*covering, blotting out, and not imputing sin, and the imputing of righteousness*^m: all which, but particularly the two last, speak the freedom of that mercy which deals with sinners as if they had never been such; and makes the act entirely God's, when accepting of that for righteousness which no equity or desert could oblige him to accept. From hence it is that we so often see the *grace*, the *goodness*, the *lovingkindness* of God magnified on this occasionⁿ; and that this apostle insists upon it as an instance of all these, that God *justifieth the ungodly*, and to him that *worketh not* (that is, hath done nothing at all to deserve it) *reckons his faith for righteousness*^o.

By *inheritance* and *life* here being put as terms of the same signification, we are plainly given to understand that the former must not be restrained to *Canaan only*, (which was therefore called *the land of promise*, because God engaged to give it to Abraham and his seed for a possession,) but that somewhat better was included in it; even that immortality and blissful region, which they, who are freed from the curse and punishment of sin, have a right to expect and to dwell in. This is styled in the New Testament *the inheritance of the sanctified*—*the inheritance of the saints in light*—*an inheritance incorruptible, and that fadeth not away, for ever in the heavens*^p: with regard to this Christians are denominated *heirs*—*heirs of God*—*joint-heirs with Christ*—*heirs of salvation*—*heirs of promise*—*heirs according to the hope of eternal life*^q: and, lastly, with regard to this it is that Abraham himself, when *sojourning in the land of promise*, is expressly observed to have sustained his pilgrimage upon some better and more distant view; for (says the apostle) *he looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God*^r.

—From hence it seems to be sufficiently clear, that St. Paul by *justification* means that absolution from guilt which Abraham received at the time of the promise made to him, when he was rescued from the condemnation and punishment of that idolatry in which he had lived before the true God had revealed his will to him. And that by *life* and *inheritance* he does not mean the actual enjoyment of these, but such a title to them as heirs have to estates, of which they have all the assurance that a presumptive or apparent right in law can convey, but not a present and a full possession. And in proportion, that, with regard to those whom he speaks of as justified after Abraham's example, he designs such a *remission of sins that are past*, as puts them in

^m Rom. v. 9; 2 Cor. v. 19; Col. i. 10; Acts iii. 19; xiii. 38, 39; Rom. iv. 6, 7, 8.
ⁿ Tit. iii. 5. ^o Rom. iv. 5; Ephes. ii. 8, 9. ^p Acts xx. 32; xxvi. 11; Coloss. i. 12; 1 Pet. i. 4.
^q Rom. viii. 17; Heb. i. 14; vi. 17. James ii. 5; 1 Pet. iii. 7; Tit. iii. 7. ^r Heb. xi. 9, 10.

a capacity of entering into covenant and favour with God, such as is actually conferred at the time of covenanting with him. To which purpose it is that he mentions their being *now*², that is, already *justified*, and expressly declares the term from whence this advantage commenced, by saying, *And such* (that is, notorious sinners unqualified for the kingdom of God, like the persons instanced in just before) *such were some of you: but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified*¹: intimating very plainly that this change of condition was made at their baptism. In like manner again, they from the time of their adoption became *sons and heirs*, but *heirs according to promise*³; as Abraham and his seed were of the land of Canaan; which God gave them at present the assurance of, but not the possession till more than four hundred years after.

II. I come now, in the second place, to consider the nature of that *faith* which St. Paul here represents as the condition of obtaining these privileges. And in this inquiry also we shall best be guided by the instance of Abraham. Of him it is said that he *believed God*, and *that was reckoned to him for righteousness*⁴: which, by what went before, appears to be a phrase equivalent with saying, *by that faith he was justified*. Now faith in God, in the most obvious and natural sense, is an assent of the mind to the certainty of such a Being, and to the truth of that which he reveals. In the former respect it is used by the apostle to the Hebrews; *He that cometh to God must believe that he is*⁵; in the latter, when Abraham is said to believe the promise of God referred to in this place. But when it is farther observed how the history acquaints us that God, at the very time of making that promise, commanded Abraham to forsake his country and idolatrous relations, and of that readiness he shewed to do so; this proves the nature of justifying faith to be such a firm and lively assent to the certainty of that promise, as disposed Abraham, in consideration of it, to comply with that command of God with which it was accompanied.

Thus, by parity of reason, *faith in Jesus Christ* is believing that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and Saviour of the world; and such a hearty persuasion of this truth, as, in view of the benefits derivable from that character, is determined to enter into covenant with him, and accept the condition on which those benefits are proposed. This was the faith of the converts made by St. Peter's sermon on the day of Pentecost⁶; this the faith of the eunuch instructed by Philip⁷; this the faith of Cornelius and his company⁸; this the faith of St. Paul's jailor and his family⁹; this, generally speaking, is the *faith* to which justification, in the sense already enlarged upon, is attributed as its conditional cause; and which we find distinguished from and opposed to works and the law, in regard of its being followed by that beneficial effect which they were in no capacity of producing. For such is manifestly St. Paul's meaning (as in the twenty-first and second of this chapter, and infinite other texts of like importance, so

¹ Rom. v. 9.² 1 Cor. vi. 11.³ Gal. iv. 7.⁴ Gen. xv. 6; Rom. iv. 3.⁵ Heb. xi. 6.⁶ Acts ii. 37, 38.⁷ Acts viii. 36, 37.⁸ Acts x. 45—48.⁹ Acts xvi. 31, 32, 33.

particularly) in those words to the men of Antioch; *Be it known unto you therefore, that through this man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins: and by him all that believe are justified from all things, from which ye could not be justified by the law of Moses*^c.

III. This assertion of St. Paul brings me very naturally to my third head, which is intended to prove the law insufficient for conveying the benefits here ascribed to faith; that is, justification and eternal life. And the proof of this will rest upon two arguments: first, that the law nowhere covenants for remission of sin, and clearing the conscience of guilt; secondly, that the promises made to encourage men in their obedience are conceived in such terms as extend to temporal blessings only.

1. The law nowhere covenants for forgiveness of sins, or absolving the conscience from guilt. By the law may be understood either the moral or the ceremonial. The moral is contained in the Ten Commandments delivered on mount Sinai; the tenor whereof is plainly no more than the enjoining of precepts to be punctually observed, without any the least intimation of pardon or gracious allowance to them who either wilfully or through infirmity and surprise should transgress or neglect their duty in any point. And yet the condition of the persons under it was so far from capable of an unsinning obedience, that the holy men of those times frequently express their sense of it. Thus Joshua; *Ye cannot serve the Lord: for he is an holy God; he is a jealous God; he will not forgive your transgressions nor your sins*^d. Thus David; *There is none good, no, not one; they are all gone out of the way; they are all become unprofitable*^e. *If God should be extreme to mark what is done amiss, who might (that is, none could) abide it?* With many other passages to the same purpose; enough to bear St. Paul out in declaring that he said no other things than such as Moses and the prophets had spoken, when affirming *all the world to have become guilty before God; and that by the deeds of the law no flesh shall be justified in his sight*^f.

The ceremonial law indeed consisted of many sacrifices and purifications, but to what degree of efficacy these extended is exceeding plain from the account of their respective appointments. The general end whereof was to qualify men for access to God in the place of his solemn worship, and for holding the privileges of an external communion with him, and with their brethren of the commonwealth of Israel. But for satisfying for or abolishing of guilt, or pacifying the wrath of God against the sinner, the apostle hath by several unanswerable arguments proved them to be altogether useless and unprofitable. He shews it from the nature of the services themselves, which in correspondence to the benefits procured by them is purely external. From whence he calls them *carnal ordinances*, such as serve only to the *purifying of the flesh*^g; and argues, that for *purging the conscience from dead works*, a much more powerful cleansing, even an offering through the Spirit, was necessary. He shews it from the frequent repetition of them, in regard they would certainly have *ceased to be offered*^h, had they

^c Acts xiii. 38, 39.

^d Joshua xxiv. 19.

^e Psalm xiv. 3.

^f Psalm cxxx. 3.

^g Psalm cxlvi. 2; Rom. iii. 19, 20.

^h Heb. ix. 10, 13, 14.

ⁱ Heb. x. 12.

made the comers thereunto so *purged and perfect* as to leave behind no consciousness of sin. He proves it from the promise of a priesthood and a sacrifice different from that of Aaron^k, which implies the imperfection of all atonements supposed to be made by the former; and therefore, that both the order and the law to which it ministered is *changed for the weakness and unprofitableness thereof*. He proves it once more by the promise of another covenant, expressly said to differ from that in Horeb; as upon other accounts, so particularly upon this, that *God would be merciful to their unrighteousness, and would remember their sins and iniquities no more*^l. Than the mention of which, as a special privilege belonging to this subsequent covenant, nothing could possibly be more absurd; if we suppose that covenant in Horeb to have already made effectual provision for the pardon of sin.

Now if the law be insufficient to justify, it must needs be so for conveying a title to the inheritance and the life meant in the scripture before us; for nothing is more evident, than that all right to these is forfeited by sin, and consequently not capable of being restored by any dispensation which cannot take away the guilt and punishment of sin. But this is farther evident from the temper and design of the law itself. The moral law threatening temporal punishments only; for some transgressions, as that of idolatry in particular, it inflicted death, and denounced a succession of judgments *unto the third and fourth generation*^m. For a reward of obedience, as in the *fifth commandment*ⁿ, it promised a long and prosperous enjoyment of the land which God had given to the Israelites: and generally it appoints some particular bodily suffering for the offences reducible to each of its commands. The ceremonial law, in like manner, confines its rewards and punishments to the blessings and miseries of the present life. This is clear from innumerable testimonies in the books of Moses, but especially from the twenty-sixth chapter of Leviticus and the twenty-eighth of Deuteronomy. In all these particular regard was had to the land of Canaan, out of which many precepts of the law were plainly impracticable; to the temper and circumstances of that people, and to the prevention of those heathenish and abominable superstitions to which, by their present degeneracy, they were then strongly addicted. These all conspired to render a ritual and laborious worship, enforced by worldly considerations, necessary to contain, and as it were bridle up, a nation who were sunk beneath that manly and generous frame of spirit which is requisite in order to relish, and be effectually wrought upon by the views of a future and far distant recompense. And upon this ground it is (as I have formerly explained at large^o) that St. Paul's comparison of the *heir under age*, and the allegorical importance of the *two covenants*, in the fourth of this epistle, manifestly proceed.

Thus much may suffice for the three heads I proposed to speak to; but the subject here treated of ought by no means to be dismissed without observing to you three very considerable uses proper to be made of it; as,

^k Heb. vii. 11, 12, 18.

^m Deut. xiii. ⁿ Exod. xx. 5.

and the fourth Sunday in Lent.

^l Jer. xxxi. 31, 32, 34; Heb. viii. 8, 9, 12; x. 16, 17.

^o See Epistle for the Sunday after Christmas,

1. First, by the account given here of justification, we shall find it no hard matter to reconcile this and other scriptures, which attribute this privilege entirely to faith, with some, and particularly with that famous one of St. James, which deny that a man is justified by faith without works^p. For indeed the word in the places so seemingly different is certainly used in two different senses; and all the difficulty of reconciling them arises from the want of attending to this observation, and so applying it in one and the same sense. The justification ascribed by St. Paul to faith without works is absolution from sins committed by men before they believe in Christ: and the not having those sins imputed, but being admitted to peace and favour with God upon entrance into covenant with him. And this cannot possibly be owing to good works, because, till interested in Christ, and assisted by his grace, they can have no such works to owe them to. Upon which account St. Paul styles converted believers, *God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to good works*^q. Insinuating by that metaphor, that men in this respect had no being at all before God formed them into that new creature: and that the spiritual is, as the natural man was, produced by his almighty power out of principles of themselves incapable of producing it.

But this word hath also another meaning in Scripture, whereby is signified the full and final justification of good men in their last great account. Thus we find it used by our blessed Saviour^r, *I say unto you, That every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment. For by thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned*. Thus even by St. Paul himself^s, *Not the hearers of the law are just before God, but the doers of the law shall be justified....in the day when God shall judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ, according to my gospel*. For that this is the time and matter there referred to is manifest from another text of like importance concerning his own case^t: *I know nothing by myself; yet am I not hereby justified: but he that judgeth me is the Lord. Therefore judge nothing before the time, until the Lord come, who both will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and will make manifest the counsels of the hearts; and then shall every man have praise of God*. Thus also St. James uses it in his second chapter: as is abundantly manifest from making this expression equivalent to that of final salvation; for so he does, by saying^u, *What doth it profit if a man say he hath faith, and have not works? Can faith save him? And again, Ye see how that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only*. This is manifest, secondly, by the nature and purpose of the works he mentions^v. They are such as the man's faith is to be shewn by; and consequently must be subsequent to that faith of which they are the fruits and evidences. And these may be assisting to our full and final justification, but cannot be so to that justification which admits to a covenant state, at which time it hath been shewed that a man can have no such works at all: and consequently these cannot be the same works with those denied by St. Paul to contribute any thing to the justifying of the un-

^p James ii. 14, &c.^q Ephes. ii. 10.^r Matt. xii. 36, 37.^s Rom. ii. 13, 16.^t 1 Cor. iv. 4, 5.^u Ver. 14 compared with ver. 24.^v Ver. 18.

godly. This is manifest again, thirdly, by the different use these two apostles make of the instance of Abraham; who, in St. Paul's sense^y, was *justified* at the time of believing the promise made by God to him, and before he had any works to recommend him, but was justified according to St. James's sense^z *after* and by *offering up his son Isaac*; and consequently that *justification* cannot be the same which is ascribed to causes so different, and made to commence from periods so distant. For Abraham was *justified*, absolved from past sins, blessed with the promise, and had the belief of that promise reckoned to him for righteousness, fifty years at least before that action by which St. James pronounces him justified, and a hundred years before his own death, till which time no man can be fully and finally so^a. Hence it appears that in their arguments and accounts concerning this matter, the two apostles are at perfectly good agreement; that each have authorities from other parts of Scripture for the meanings put by them upon this word respectively; that both cannot possibly intend the same thing; and that many may be *justified* in the one of these meanings who are not like ever to be so in the other; because no man is *justified* in St. Paul's sense with works, and no man is *justified* in St. James's sense without them.

2. Secondly, hence we may learn how widely, how dangerously indeed those men mistake the matter, who, from this and other like passages of Scripture, teach men to rest upon faith alone, and deny the necessity of good works in order to salvation. The fundamental error of this doctrine seems to spring from hence: that they who advance it ascribe to that faith which St. James declares insufficient all the glorious effects attributed to the faith mentioned and magnified by St. Paul; and on the other hand, apply all the disparaging reflections cast upon the works declared of no effect to this purpose by St. Paul, to the works which we find so peremptorily required by St. James. Whereas in truth, neither is the faith nor are the works intended by these two apostles the same. For the faith in St. Paul is that belief which is antecedent to or concomitant with our first entrance into the Christian covenant; and this, as it disposes us to contract for, so it is presumed to be (as in all reason it must be) lively and strong enough to prevail for a sincere and constant compliance with all those duties, in the observance whereof the making good our part of the contract consists. And this is the reason why it is so highly commended. But the faith in St. James is a bare speculative assent to the truth of the Christian revelation, without any effect or influence at all upon our hearts and lives; and this is the reason of its being so highly condemned, called a *dead* faith, and resembled to the *belief of devils*^b. Again, the works to which St. Paul allows so mean a character are those of the moral or ritual law, done upon principles of mere reason and nature; such as are done by our own strength, or such as presume upon a reward due to our own desert; but always done before the belief and embracing of the Christian religion; but now the works insisted on as necessary by St. James are subsequent to our Christ-

^y Rom. iv.^z James ii. 21.^a Usser. Annal. Patrick on Gen. xiii.^b James ii. 14, 17, 24, 26.

ianity; evidences of the sincerity and vigour of that faith which made us Christians; performed by the assistances of that Spirit bestowed on us when we became such; and in an humble confidence of being graciously accepted, not for their own, but for Christ Jesus his sake. And of these St. Paul speaks no less gloriously than St. James. In regard to these it is that we find him, in the fifth of this Epistle^c, laying down a catalogue of *the fruits of the Spirit*; declaring that the only thing that can avail Christians is *faith which worketh by love*; a phrase explained again in this very Epistle by that of *a new creature*^d; urging, that *the end of the commandment is charity, out of a pure heart, and of a good conscience, and faith unfeigned*^e. To the same effect he mentions *the law of faith, the obedience of faith, the good fight of faith*^f. He joins together the *work of faith, and labour of love, and patience of hope*^g. He charges his son Timothy to *follow after righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, meekness, peace, with them that call on the Lord out of a pure heart*^h. And, to name no more, so far is he from ascribing the whole of a Christian's duty or salvation to this grace alone, after his conversion, as to say that the *whole law is comprehended and fulfilled in love*, and that *now abide these three, faith, hope, charity; but the greatest of these is charity*ⁱ. I forbear more testimonies of this kind, and will only remark concerning those already produced, that as I have confined myself in the choice of them to the writings of St. Paul, so a great part are, and a vast number more might be, taken out of those very epistles where the main strength of the patrons for a naked and unfruitful faith is supposed to lie. In short, no man is more affectionate in pressing a good life than this apostle; and as he extols faith and vilifies works, before conversion and the covenant, to the last degree, (in which he is not contradicted at all by St. James,) so where he speaks of faith after the covenant struck, and in order to the perfecting of a Christian's salvation, he plainly includes the effect in the cause, and intends the selfsame thing by faith alone that St. James means by faith and works both.

3. From what hath been said concerning the insufficiency of the law to confer justification and eternal life, we may take occasion to observe, what intimations of these mercies were given, and whence they were derived, both before and under the law. That such intimations there were, not only from nature, but also from reason confirmed by revelation, is plain from the passage now under debate, which affirms them to have been promised to Abraham some centuries of years before the law. And, not to multiply proofs in so clear a case, the eleventh to the Hebrews is nothing else but a long list of good men, who firmly believed, and were supported under all their difficulties by an assured expectation of them. So that we have need only to inquire what foundation they had for such dependence and belief.

Now for this purpose we are to consider, that sin being the only cause of misery and death, wheresoever God promises a Redeemer he

^c Galat. v. 22, 23. ^d Ch. vi. 15. ^e 1 Tim. i. 5. ^f Rom. xiii. 27; xvi. 26.
^g 1 Tim. vi. 12. ^h 1 Thess. i. 3. ⁱ 1 Tim. vi. 11; 2 Tim. ii. 12. ^j Rom. xiii. 8, 9, 10;
Gal. v. 14; 1 Cor. xiii. 13.

promises remission of sins; and wheresoever remission of sins is promised, there is also virtually and by consequence promised a future state of immortality. In this respect then the assurances of that life and inheritance meant here immediately succeeded to the sin of our first parents in paradise.

Those assurances were again renewed to the patriarchs, not only in this passage cited by St. Paul, but in that other to Moses out of the bush. Where God called himself the God of Abraham and of Isaac and of Jacob; persons, though long since in their graves, yet with regard to him still *living*^k. And the force of this argument there is no room to doubt, after our blessed Lord himself hath made use of it to confute the Sadducees' error, and prove a resurrection.

But to conclude: the Mosaical law abounded with intimations of this nature. Its every sacrifice of propitiation figured the death of that *Lamb of God that takes away the sins of the world*. Its temporal promises of a *land flowing with milk and honey* alluded to the heavenly Canaan; the ordinances that then kept truly good men in communion with God and his people upon earth made them mystical members of Christ, and joined them to the assembly of saints in heaven^l. But still (as I lately observed^m) we must continually make a difference between their having these privileges *under* the law, and having them *by* the law. For they belonged to the law no otherwise than as that included and prefigured the gospel. This is that *better covenant which brought in a better hope, and was established upon better promises*ⁿ. This was concurrent with and antecedent to the law; nor was there ever any other name whereby men could be saved, but only the name of our Lord Jesus Christ^o. He was the end, the sum of the law; the substance of every promise, the life of every ordinance; for all without him was but a dead letter. It is therefore to the law, taken apart from and exclusive of him, that the many terms of diminution and reproach in the New Testament are to be applied. It is to the same law, implying, representing, exhibiting, and leading to him, (and to the law purely as such,) that any commendations given to it are due. But yet this, even in its highest and best capacity, comes infinitely short of the Christian dispensation. For now the shadows are dispelled, the veils laid aside; the true sacrifice for sin offered, *death abolished by Jesus Christ, and life and immortality brought to light through the gospel*^p. For which all honour and glory, thanksgiving and praise, be to God the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, now and for ever. Amen.

THE THIRTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY.

THE GOSPEL. St. Luko x. 23.

23 *Blessed are the eyes which see the things that ye see:*

23, 24. The happiness that ye have in seeing the

^k Exod. iii; Matt. xxii.
after Trinity.

ⁿ Heb. vii.

^l Heb. iv; xii.

^o Acts v. 32.

^m Epistle for twelfth Sunday
P 2 Tim. i. 10.

24 *For I tell you, that many prophets and kings have desired to see those things which ye see, and have not seen them; and to hear those things which ye hear, and have not heard them.* miracles, conversing with the person of the Messiah, and hearing the mysteries of his gospel unfolded, hath been the wish of many excellent persons; but is a blessing in the enjoyment whereof ye excel the greatest and the best men that ever went before you.

25 *And, behold, a certain lawyer stood up, and tempted him, saying, Master, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?*

26 *He said unto him, What is written in the law? how readest thou?*

27 *And he answering said, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind: and thy neighbour as thyself.*

28 *And he said unto him, Thou hast answered right: this do, and thou shalt live.*

29 *But he, willing to justify himself, said unto Jesus, And who is my neighbour?*

and grounding that confidence upon a tradition, that those of their own nation alone had a title to this love, puts a second question, How far the true import of the word neighbour extends.

30 *And Jesus answering said, A certain man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell among thieves, which stripped him of his raiment, and wounded him, and departed, leaving him half dead.* 30. To this Jesus made no direct answer, but leaves him to collect it from the following parable, of a man travelling in a road grievously infested with robbers, as that between Jerusalem and Jericho was. (For St. Jerome takes notice of a place in this road called Adomim, that is, red or bloody, from the many outrages and murders committed there, and mentions a fort built there, in which soldiers were placed to guard the ways and succour the passengers^a.)

—31 *And by chance there came down a certain priest that way: and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side.*

32 *And likewise a Levite, when he was at the place, came and looked on him, and passed by on the other side.*

33 *But a certain Samaritan, as he journeyed, came where he was: and when he saw him, he had compassion on him.*

34 *And went to him, and bound up his wounds, pouring in oil and wine, and set him on his own beast, and brought him to an inn, and took care of him.*

^a De Loc. Hebr. pag. 5. edit. Froben.

35 *And on the morrow when he departed, he took out two pence, and gave them to the host, and said unto him, Take care of him; and whatsoever thou spendest more, when I come again, I will repay thee.*

36 *Which now of these three, thinkest thou, was neighbour unto him that fell among the thieves?*

37 *And he said, He that shewed mercy on him. Then said Jesus unto him, Go, and do thou likewise.*

distressed person, whosoever he be that stands in need of it; and makest no difficulty to use even a Samaritan as kindly as this Samaritan used that Jew.

36. Judge now from hence, which of these did the neighbour's part.

37. Then dost thou also fulfil this command, when thou shewest mercy to any

COMMENT.

Two very material points relating to the duty of love to our neighbour were long since^b reserved to be treated of in this place. The first concerns the object of that love, or the persons to whom it ought to extend. The second, the measure and degree of this love, and the instances whereby it ought to be expressed. The Gospel for this day ministers a fit occasion for explaining both these, which I shall do as clearly and as briefly as I can.

1. The first of these will best be understood by considering the manner in which our Lord chooses to answer that question at the twentieth verse, *Who is my neighbour?* A question, as the paraphrase hinted, which had its chief foundation in the Jewish schools. Whose proud distinctions and subtle glosses had narrowed the just extent of this word, by confining it to persons of their own nation and religion. For answer, therefore, our Lord states the case of a Jew in distress relieved by a Samaritan, after that two of his own countrymen had neglected him. And then appeals to the inquirer's own sense, which of the three approved himself the distressed party's neighbour: who readily and rightly determined, *He that shewed mercy on him*^c.

This account is no doubt intended to teach us, that we must by no means straiten our bowels, by confining our notion of neighbourhood to a space so stinted as our own kindred, or friends, or acquaintance, or our own country, or our own persuasion; but that all mankind, even strangers, even enemies, (for I shall prove both these included in the character of a Samaritan,) are to be esteemed within the compass of it. That no man discharges his duty in this particular, who does not contribute what he can to the help of any indigent forlorn creature. That human nature and necessity are always good titles to pity and assistance; and that no other consideration is sufficient to acquit our cruelty when we refuse it, be the party at never so great a distance from or difference with us; be he utterly unknown to or unheard of by us.

All these conclusions result from the character of a Samaritan. Of

^b Epistle for Advent Sunday.

^c Ver. 36, 37.

the enmity and aversion between which people and the Jews the Scriptures have given us frequent intimations. Thus the woman at Jacob's well stood astonished at our Saviour's entering into conversation with or desiring any courtesy of her. *How is it, said she^d, that thou, being a Jew, askest drink of me, who am a woman of Samaria?* And thus, on the other hand, our Lord could not, in his passage through this country, obtain any reception, *because his face was as though he would go to Jerusalem^e*. Now though this difference itself be very notorious, yet by reason the causes of it are not so commonly known, and because it may be of some service to the argument I am upon that they should be very well known, I will endeavour to give an account of them, in as few words as the matter will well allow.

The first breach taken notice of we find in the book of Kings, when the ten tribes withdrew their allegiance from Rehoboam and the house of David, and erected a kingdom distinct from Judah and Benjamin^f. This revolt Jeroboam contrived to perpetuate, by making Samaria their capital city, and setting up idols in Bethel and Dan, lest the people's attendance upon the exercises of religion, enjoined to be performed at Jerusalem, should be instrumental in reviving their commerce with Judah, and by degrees reduce and unite them again. That politic corruption of their worship grew so general, and so provoking to Almighty God, that he permitted Shalmaneser, king of Assyria, to subdue and carry them away captive^g. In the place of whom were transplanted thither a colony of idolaters, who, with the remnant left behind, made up a strange confusion both of nations and religions. So that the Jews, who still kept constant to the profession and service of the one true God, had now little or no communication with them.

That distance grew afterwards into enmity and open opposition; for, after the return from Babylon, these idolatrous Samaritans by all manner of means laboured to obstruct the building of the second temple, and zealously employed their interest in the kings of Persia to discountenance the attempt^h. But the greatest and most irreconcilable part of the quarrel followed after this. For every man after the captivity being obliged to part with their strange wives, it happened that Manasses, brother to the high priest, had married the daughter of Sanballat the Horonite, a famous bitter enemy to the Jews, and was excommunicated for refusing to put her from himⁱ. When this man was disposed to submit, for the sake of preserving his reputation and dignity with the Jews, his father-in-law proposed to make him amends by building a temple on mount Gerizim, of which he should be supreme, independent upon and equal to the high priest at Jerusalem^k. This was accordingly done, and made the schism incurable. The Samaritans held their temple in veneration equal to that paid by the Jews to theirs. *Our fathers, says the woman of Samaria to our blessed Saviour, worshipped in this mountain, and ye say, that in Jerusalem is the place where men ought to worship^l*. Hither many malecontents resorted, much people were drawn off, and all sorts

^d John iv. 9.^e Luke ix. 53.^f 1 Kings xii.^g 2 Kings xvii.^h Ezra iv.ⁱ Nehem. vi; Joseph. Antiq. l. ii; Ezra x; Nehem. xiii. 23—28.^k Joseph. Antiq.

l. ii. cap. 8.

^l John iv. 19.

of scandalous and disaffected persons came to Manasses, as a common sanctuary. This difference therefore was principally upon a religious account. A provocation and affront to God, which the Jews esteemed themselves in duty bound to resent, and thought no expressions of indignation and abhorrence could be too great; so that there was not upon earth with them a creature more detested than a Samaritan. They loaded these separatists with execrations, they refused all dealings with them in the common business of life; they would not allow them the usual civilities to strangers, nor do for them any of those offices of humanity which no one man would think much to do for any other man. And the Samaritans (like the generality of those at whom the guilt of separation lies) were on their part no whit behind-hand in perverseness and spite. The instance therefore of charity here described was such as, all circumstances considered, could least be expected. So that this example^m, when drawn into a rule, and made, as here it is, a pattern for others to copy after, does manifestly import, that, let a person in necessity and affliction be who or what he will, still he is a proper object of our charity; and we are bound to be touched with and to have a very tender compassion for his case.

II. But, secondly, a due consideration of the instance now before us, would be a good intimation how far the testimonies of our kindness to such persons ought to extend. The cheapest and easiest degree of love to our neighbour, that which no man's circumstances render him incapable of, and therefore the least that can possibly be due from any man, is pity and good wishes. To grieve with the miserable when we see their distress, and to pray that matters may be better with them; this is a good office that costs us nothing, which one would imagine should dispose all people to be very free of it. And yet, to the shame (I will not say of the Christian religion, but) of human nature be it spoken, too many are defective even in this particular; for how great are the numbers who have no howels, no feeling at all of the cold and nakedness, the hunger and thirst, the sickness and anguish of their suffering brethren! And, which is yet a great deal worse, if those brethren happen to be such whose principles are different, or whose behaviour hath been disobliging and injurious, how frequent is it to rejoice and triumph in their calamities, to imitate the malice of the devil himself, and to think no music comparable to that which the sighs and groans of afflicted enemies make in their ears! These wretches cry out with David's persecutors, *There, there, so would we have it!* and crucify again our blessed Saviour by insulting, when they think those foes which are members of his mystical body scourged and forsaken of God. This is really a quality savouring of hell, and those spirits of envy that inhabit there: and I would to God, as it is fit for no other, so it were to be found in no other place. However, if it must meet with entertainment upon earth, let it at least be confined to heathens and infidels; but for Christians, upon any difference or grudge, to conceive a wicked joy at the miseries of fellow-Christians, is certainly most monstrous and abominable.

We will hope then (though God knows it is almost against hope) that no minds so envenomed can be found where the sun of righteousness and his glorious gospel have shined. But alas! it is but too evident that where the light of these is come, the warmth of them is wanting; that our hearts are still so frozen, as with a cold indifference to behold the wants and the misfortunes of the poor and miserable. Like the priest and the Levite before us, if we do not entertain ourselves with the sad spectacle, yet we can *come to the place* where the deplorable object lies, and *look on*, and *pass by* without any manner of impression; or if we shake our heads, and appear to lament the case, yet does not this much mend the matter. For, as St. James hath argued very justly, *if a brother or sister be naked, and destitute of daily food, and one of you say unto them, Depart in peace, be ye warmed and filled; notwithstanding ye give them not those things which are needful to the body; what doth it profit?* Wishes and words will neither fill nor clothe them. And it is plain, that though we should suppose the priest and Levite to have given thus much, yet neither of them discharged the duty of a neighbour.

The Samaritan therefore, who made good that character, did not express his pity in idle and unprofitable bemoanings, but in active and effectual relief. He expended his own provisions, poured the oil and wine bought for his own use into the bleeding wounds of the forlorn stranger; dismounted himself, and set the impotent wretch upon his own beast; conveyed him to a place of rest and refreshment; furnished him with necessaries during their stay together; and at parting, undertook for the continuance of his support and the perfecting of his recovery. And all this he frankly did when his own countrymen, when they whose professions obliged them more especially to be charitable, had overlooked and done nothing at all for him.

This deportment again instructs us, that it is not sufficient to have a tender sense of want and distress, without expressing that sense in such instances of succour as our own and the sufferer's circumstances shall render seasonable and proper; that we ought to be content with some inconvenience, to give ourselves some trouble, not to grudge some expense, for such a one's comfort and relief; that we should not be weary of well-doing, but carry on our compassion and liberality to perfection, and not think much to continue our assistance, so long as there continues to be need of it; that we may not turn a fit object off, and shelter our inhumanity under that too common, but very frivolous excuse of some who are more nearly allied, or more strongly obliged to such care than we are, having neglected him. For what is more absurd than to suppose that another's crime can be our justification? A countryman, an acquaintance, a near relation may be hardhearted and unnatural; but if they have not done their part, the obligation is not less, and the occasion is greater for us to do ours. And though the party in affliction be neither kinsman nor friend, nay an heretic, an heathen, an enemy though he be, yet is he still in the gospel-sense *our neighbour*: and consequently it is our part to contribute all we can that may be serviceable for his consolation and assist-

ance, his support under and his deliverance out of his sufferings and sorrows.

And this is truly and properly to *love our neighbour as ourselves*. The meaning of which command is not, either that we should love any neighbour with equal tenderness as ourselves, (for that I conceive is hardly possible;) or that we should love every neighbour alike, (which if we suppose possible, were neither just nor natural;) or that we should do for our neighbour all that he now does, or that we if in his circumstances might perhaps wish and desire to be done for ourselves; (for such desires may be irregular, or, if not sinful, yet unreasonable.) But it is to do all that for him which, were our case his, and his ours, we should in reason and good conscience expect and be glad to have done to us. And as the love a man bears to himself is always sincere, so should the love to our neighbour be in this respect as that to ourselves: not mercenary and designing, but disinterested and hearty; intending the benefit of the party we express it to, not indirectly seeking our own profit or pleasure. And, as an evident proof whose good it is we aim at, not balking any proper expression of it, either to them who have no past or personal considerations to induce it, or to them from whom we can have no prospect or human possibility of a return to be made for it.

And as the propriety of the parable here is evident for explaining the nature and extent of our duty, so should the authority of the person propounding it be, in this above all other points, reputed an indispensable engagement upon us. For of that merciful and loving Jesus himself this account is a most lively representation. He was the good Samaritan indeed, who found poor human nature wounded, and bound, left more than half dead, and stript of all its valuable perfections by the merciless robber and adversary of souls. His bowels yearned over our distressed condition; and when neither the Levitical law, nor the sacrifices offered by Jewish priests, had (as I have shewn on the Epistle for this day) administered any sort of comfort or relief, he came, a stranger, from his blissful dwelling, kindly made towards us, bound up our wounds and bruises, poured out his soul to the death, and applied the sovereign balsam of his own blood. He took us up, and removed us away into a more saving dispensation; clothed us with his own righteousness as with a robe, and wrought a perfect cure upon us, at the expense of many miracles and mighty condescensions, and infinite hardships and sufferings to himself. His occasions indeed would not allow him to stay with us till all the effects of this goodness were accomplished; but he hath left us in safe hands, and given commission for a constant supply of spiritual sustenance and remedies; which them who distribute faithfully he will certainly, when he comes again, repay: and them who receive regularly and thankfully, he will as certainly heal and nourish unto life eternal.

And ought not, O my friends, such a pattern as this to have the weight of ten thousand arguments with us? How can they grudge fit expressions of love to their brethren in distress, who at all remember what the Son of God did in their utmost, their desperate extremity, not esteem too much to do for them? Who, lastly, can have the con-

fidence to think himself excused toward those of a differing judgment, or disobliging behaviour, or most wrongful malice and spite: when herein chiefly *God commendeth his love towards us, that while we were yet sinners, the most fatally mistaken, the worst and most disingenuous of his creatures here below, the bitterest and most detestable of all enemies, Christ died for us?* For which inestimable benefit and love all honour and praise, thanksgiving and obedience be unto Him, who left us an example, that herein we should follow his steps.

THE FOURTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY.

THE COLLECT.

ALMIGHTY and everlasting God, give unto us the increase of faith, hope, and charity; and, that we may obtain that which thou dost promise, make us to love that which thou dost command; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

THE EPISTLE. Gal. v. 16.

16 *This I say then, Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh.* 16. The advice I give for avoiding the abuse of your Christian liberty, and that strife and uncharitableness mentioned just before, is, that you would behave yourselves as men that make the gospel their rule, and are guided by the Spirit of God, which will prevent your being enslaved by the lusts of the flesh.

17 *For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other: so that ye cannot do the things that ye would.* 17. For there is a carnal principle in us, which opposes the motions of that spiritual; and there is a spiritual one, which opposes the carnal, and hinders our compliance with the motions of that carnal, notwithstanding we are by nature inclined to obey them.

18 *But if ye be led of the Spirit, ye are not under the law.* 18. Now they who have the grace of the Holy Spirit for their guidance, which is a privilege belonging to the gospel, are freed from and above that less perfect dispensation of the law.

19 *Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are these; adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness,* 19. Now that carnal principle, when not restrained by grace (as it could not be by virtue of the law, for that conveyed no such privilege) exerts itself in such plainly wicked and abominable practices as these: idolatry, &c.

20 *Idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies,*

21 *Envyings, murders, drunkenness, revellings, and such like : of the which I tell you before, as I have also told you in time past, that they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God.*

22 *But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith,*

23 *Meekness, temperance : against such there is no law.*

23. There is no law that condemns such virtuous dispositions and practices as these.

24 *And they that are Christ's have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts.* 24. And they that truly belong to Christ make proof of it by mortifying the corrupt inclinations of the carnal principle in their hearts.

COMMENT.

For a right improvement of the scripture now in hand, it may suffice to observe the following particulars :

I. First, The just extent and meaning of those expressions, *walking in the Spirit*, and *being led by the Spirit*. There are few words in Scripture of larger and more ambiguous signification than this of *spirit*. Sometimes it signifies an intelligent and immaterial substance at large, as in that proposition, *God is a spirit*^a. Sometimes it is the understanding part of the human mind, distinguished not only from the body, but from that seat of the affections which philosophers are wont to call the sensitive soul. Thus St. Paul asks, *Who knoweth the things of a man, save the spirit of man which is in him*^b? And prays for the Thessalonians, *that their whole spirit, and soul, and body, may be preserved blameless unto the coming of the Lord Jesus*^c. Sometimes it denotes the third person in the blessed Trinity, as when we read of the Spirit being *grieved, tempted, sent*; and upon many other accounts mentioned in such manner as I had occasion to explain at large upon the Gospel for Whitsunday. Sometimes it is put for the gifts and graces of that Spirit, whether ordinary or extraordinary, of which the reader need go no farther for satisfaction than the Epistle for the tenth Sunday after Trinity. And sometimes again it imports the gospel of Christ, the reason and propriety whereof I have very lately accounted for^d. So that it shall suffice at present to say, that in the place before us it must needs be taken in one of the *three* senses last mentioned; and in any of them it will answer the apostle's purpose, as is manifest by his opposing it to the flesh and the law. For the flesh here denotes that corrupt principle in every man, which strongly disposes us to sinful and present profits and pleasures. And as the gospel is sometimes called *the Spirit*, because the graces and guidance of the Holy Ghost are a privilege peculiar to this dispensation, and expressly covenanted for under it; so the law is sometimes called *the*

^a John iv. 24.

^b 1 Cor. ii. 11.

^c 1 Thess. v. 23.

^d Epist. for the Twelfth Sunday after Trinity.

flesh, because it neither could convey nor did contract for any such supernatural assistances; but left men under the power of their sensual inclinations, without the counterbalance of any higher and better principle.

Now the use I would make of these several distinctions is, to infer from them, that leading a life of purity and virtue, in opposition to our brutish and carnal lusts, and a law of carnal ordinances; *living by faith and grace*, in opposition to work, and any confidence in moral duties performed by reason and natural strength; that governing ourselves by the word of Christ, and following the directions and holy motions of his good Spirit within us; that these, I say, however expressed variously, do mean and come all to the same thing at last; that he who does one of them does the other; and that *having the Spirit, living after the Spirit, walking in the Spirit, and being led by the Spirit*, include them all, in which soever of the forenamed meanings the word *Spirit* be used or interpreted. For evidence hereof no other argument is needful than St. Paul's catalogue of virtues here, which he so positively affirms to be *the fruit of the Spirit*^c; and that long black roll of vices which he denominates *works of the flesh*, and the *crucifying* whereof he gives in as a certain mark of being Christ's. So perfectly unscriptural are the fanciful notions which some have advanced concerning the actings and the signs of the Spirit; so great an indignity to true evangelical religion are all the reproaches and disparagements cast upon moral duties performed by the assistances of his grace; I say by the assistance of his grace, because the

II. Second thing I would observe is that encouragement for *walking in the Spirit*, but especially the ground and foundation of it, in the sixteenth and seventeenth verses. The encouragement itself is, that by *walking in the Spirit we shall not fulfil the lusts of the flesh*; that is, we shall by our obedience to the gospel, and by the power of that grace which always accompanies the true and practical belief of it, be rescued from the tyranny of our lusts, and not comply with their seducements and wicked suggestions. This, I presume, is plain enough, and easily accounted for; but the difficulty lies in the connexion of the next words, which plainly makes them the argument whereon this encouragement depends: *Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lusts of the flesh*. How can we be sure that such walking will be attended with so happy an effect? Why even from hence; *For*, (says he) that is, because *the flesh lusteth against the spirit, and the spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary the one to the other, so that ye cannot do the things that ye would*. The true meaning whereof must certainly be, that as Christians, who still continue to be men, do carry about with them a corrupt principle inclining them one way; so have they, by virtue of their being Christians, a supernatural and divine principle drawing them another way. That the former constantly disposes them to evil, the latter as constantly disposes them to good: the consequence of which different dispositions is, that *they cannot do those things which they would*. (Not that the regenerate man is unable to perform that good which the Spirit moves him to desire and endea-

your the performance of; but) he that is *led by* and *walks in the Spirit* cannot consent to do those evil things which the fleshly principle inclines him to. For in so doing he breaks that gospel-covenant, which hath solemnly renounced those works of the flesh; he ceases to be *led by the Spirit* the moment he fulfils any of those wicked lusts. For this is the necessary consequence of the mutual contrariety taken notice of here between these two principles. And he is assisted and strengthened by the grace and Spirit of God, which, being a principle more powerful than that of corrupt nature, enables him to resist and overcome all the suggestions and allurements of its adverse principle. In a word, as he, who is left to the powers of nature, cannot do the good which his own reason or *the law in his mind* tells him is fit to be done, because destitute of that Spirit, which is the cause of all the good we do; so he that is conducted by the Spirit cannot comply with the *law in his members*, which is the cause of all that evil we do. The former is the case of persons *under the law*, represented at large in the seventh to the Romans^f; the latter is the privilege of persons *led by the Spirit*, assigned here as a reason for their not *fulfilling the lusts of the flesh*. And the difficulty men have usually been entangled in concerning this matter arises from a mistake of the apostle's meaning and design, by supposing him to speak of the same sort of persons in both places; than which nothing can be more foreign, both from the context of each passage, and from the reason and truth of the case.

III. I observe once more, thirdly, that among *the works of the flesh* some are reckoned which seem to consist in the errors and evil dispositions of the mind: such in particular are heresy, malice, envy, &c. But the propriety of this denomination may very well be justified by considering that even these are effects of the same cause, a wicked and worldly principle; and that the ends men propose to themselves by indulging them are gratifications of the outward man, by some pleasures or advantages peculiar to the present state, and of a sensual nature. Meanwhile, when these works of the flesh are said to be *manifest*, we may fairly understand it, that the malignity of their nature and consequences evidences itself to the reason of every thinking man; and that nothing but corruption and prejudice and passion could blind our judgment, or ever reconcile us to the practice and indulgence of vices so pernicious and detestable.

I would next observe the elegance of St. Paul's metaphor, where he describes the Christian's character by *crucifying* the flesh with the affections and lusts, were it not that the next Lord's day will give me an opportunity of explaining that expression, and illustrating the beauty of it more fully than here I have room to do.

THE FOURTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY.

THE GOSPEL. St. Luke xvii. 11.

11 *And it came to pass, as Jesus went to Jerusalem, that he passed through the midst of Samaria and Galilee.*

12 *And as he entered into a certain village, there met him ten men that were lepers, which *stood afar off.*

of their brethren (see Levit. xiii. xiv.), durst not approach.

13 *And they lifted up their voices, and said, Jesus, Master, have mercy on us.*

14 *And when he saw them, he said unto them, Go shew yourselves unto the priests. And it came to pass, that, as they went, they were cleansed.*

should be found clean by virtue of his word: and accordingly, before they reached the priests, they were cleansed.

15 *And one of them, when he saw that he was healed, turned back, and with a loud voice glorified God.*

16 *And fell down* on his face at his feet, giving him thanks: and he was a Samaritan.*

17 *And Jesus answering said, Were there not ten cleansed? but where are the nine?*

18 *There are not found that returned to give glory to God, save this stranger.*

19 *And he said unto him, Arise, go thy way: thy faith hath made thee whole.*

12. *These men, being by the law of leprosy separated from society with any

14. Go offer yourselves to the examination of the priests, as the law directs. They went, believing they

16. *Now conscious of his cure, and daring to come near him.

COMMENT.

THE nature of the distemper with which these persons were infected, the legal defilement contracted by it, the obligation of presenting themselves to the priests, and the reasons for ascribing such cures to a miraculous operation, have been particularly considered heretofore*. That which remains peculiar to this place is the behaviour of the parties upon whom the benefit was bestowed. Their complaint was common as well as their calamity; but they who were unanimously loud in their request, and seemed equally sensible of their affliction, were far from being equally affected with their deliverance. Nine of the ten no sooner received the mercy but they forgot it too. And only one poor Samaritan of the whole number had the grace to come back, and with a becoming humility and zeal to pay the acknowledgments due for so sudden, so signal a benefit.

This miracle, and the circumstances attending it, (like sundry others

* Gospel for the third Sunday after the Epiphany.

done by our blessed Lord,) carried a very significant sense, couched under that which lies open to common view. It is a lively image of the reception which Jesus and his gospel met with in the world: how the ungrateful Jews rejected both with indignation and scorn; how the Gentiles, like this Samaritan, from whom such an instance of ingenuity could be least expected, received his doctrine thankfully, improved it diligently, and shewed that they valued the inestimable mercy justly.

But it offers to our consideration something besides, which we are more nearly concerned to take strict notice of. For the truth is, this passage is the very picture of mankind, and holds to us a glass, in which almost every soul may see its own disposition but too exactly resembled, too strongly reflected. The generality of the world, are they not like these lepers, extremely clamorous and importunate in their cries and complaints, impatient of sorrow and distress? but when those cries have prevailed for ease and deliverance, are they not then every whit as like them in the other part of their deportment too? For rarely, very rarely do we meet with such vigorous impressions, such becoming acknowledgments, as every considering stander-by can easily discern the goodness of God to call for at our hands. How often, in the anguish and bitterness of our souls, when a sudden danger hath threatened our persons, or a wasting sickness hath brought us down to the gates of the grave; when the guilt of our past lives hath stared us in the face, and the prospect of hell gaping to receive us hath distracted the conscience with amazement and despair; how often, I say, in seasons of public or private calamity, in concern for ourselves, or for some very dear to us, have we poured out our hearts before God, and shewed him of all our trouble! Promised, if he would spare that relation, or recover us from that disease, or put away from us that death only, or pardon that sin which wounded our hearts, that we would never forget the mighty mercy! And yet how suddenly, how scandalously, have his gracious condescensions and our most solemn and affectionate vows slipped out of our minds! How have all remembrances, all effects of his rod been quite lost and gone, as soon as ever the smart of it ceased! All, I say, except that worst and most deplorable effect of increasing our condemnation, and having his merciful answers to our requests rise up in judgment against us! We read the Gospel for this day in cold blood, and stand perhaps astonished at the stupidity of those base unthankful lepers: and yet, if we descend into our own breasts, they are able to reproach us, as Nathan did David, with a—*Thou art the man*: nay, thou art worse than the worst of those men whom thou blamest for forgetting one mercy; for every one of us have received frequent and eminent instances of the divine goodness: no day passes without refreshing our memories by new demonstrations of it; and yet (insensible wretches that we are) scarce one among us takes care to acknowledge it in any tolerable manner, or makes his praises in ease and prosperity hold proportion with his prayers when in misery and want. These are reflections which the case before us ministers but too just occasion for; and therefore the proper improvement of it

would be, I conceive, to inquire into the most probable causes of this so general ingratitude, and then to shew the mighty engagements we have to be thankful. The former, being more directly apposite to the circumstances of these lepers, shall be my business at this time; the latter will have a very fit opportunity for employing our meditations hereafter^h.

1. Now the first and principal cause of ingratitude I take to be pride. A vice of so malignant influence, that it seems at perfect enmity with every sort of virtue whatsoever: but that of thankfulness it utterly destroys, and tears up the very foundations on which this should be built. For no man will be forward to return thanks who does not esteem himself obliged; and no man can think he is obliged who does not acknowledge the receipt of somewhat more than his due. Now that acknowledgment proud men are very hardly brought to. We see in good offices that pass between one another, how apt such are to look upon all favours, all respects, as less than they deserve; to suppose their very acceptance a condescension, and all the return they owe. And were this fond imagination only among equals, it were something more tolerable; but vain man makes no difference, nor sticks to carry on the same extravagance toward Almighty God himself. He forgets the infinite distance between the Lord and Creator of all things and a poor worm of the earth. He fancies that such a one's imperfect polluted services can even merit at the hands of the Most High; and overlooks not only the defects of his best actions, but the vast black catalogue of his bad ones: both which quite cancel those pretensions, and leave him no deservings, except such as are worse than none—those of an angry justice taking vengeance in everlasting flames.

This seems to have made the difference between the nine leprous Jews and the Samaritan here. They, agreeably to the temper of that people who valued themselves upon being God's peculiar, thought nothing extraordinary that he could do for them: he, who had not the like vanity, nor any title to plead, received his cure, not as a debt, but as a grace, and demeaned himself accordingly. And in this frame of mind he shewed a nearer alliance to their boasted ancestors than those Jews who were so highly exalted with the privileges of that descent. For Abraham, who had the honour to be styled *God's friend*ⁱ, made no difficulty to humble himself with the name of *dust and ashes*^j, and in much lowliness of mind checks his own presumption for taking the boldness to speak unto the Lord. Jacob confesses himself *less than the least of all God's mercies, and of all the truth which he had shewed unto his servant*^k; and that humble sense puts him upon so gratefully recounting the increase God had given him, and acknowledging that it was of his doing alone, that he *who passed single over Jordan with his staff had now become two bands*. David acknowledges himself *a worm and no man*^l, and that meek reflection disposed him with more readiness to *offer to God the sacrifice of thanksgiving, and to pay him the vows which were promised in his*

^h Epistle for the twentieth Sunday after Trinity.

ⁱ Isaiah xli. 8.

^j Gen. xlviii. 27.

^k Gen. xxxii. 10.

^l Psalm xxxii. 6.

trouble^m. The great teacher of the Gentiles, who was taken up into the third heaven, and had revelations imparted too glorious for human tongue to utterⁿ, yet descends so low as to term himself *the least of the apostles, not meet to be called an apostle*^o; and which is more, not only *less than the least of all saints, but even chief of sinners*^p. Hence sprung those raptures of praise and thanks frequent in his Epistles, wherein all worth of his own is utterly disclaimed. *Not I*, says he, *but the grace of God that is in me*. Hence that perpetual magnifying of the Divine goodness, and the arguing that it is God only who makes one man to differ from another in any respect, that *whatsoever* any man hath, he hath received it, and received it not in the quality of a debt, but of a gift. Nay, even that *Lord of all, in whom all the fulness of the Godhead dwelt bodily*^r, did not think it beneath him to pay devout and solemn thanks to his co-equal Father upon any extraordinary demonstrations of the Divine power and love. In one word, so essential is humility to gratitude, that our excellent church hath wisely taught us^s, in the prayer appointed for that purpose, to begin with acknowledging ourselves God's *unworthy servants*. Considering well that without a due sense of a man's own unworthiness, it is not possible to render God *humble and hearty thanks for all his goodness and lovingkindness*, nor to have that *due sense of all his mercies* which must make our hearts unfeignedly thankful.

2. A second obstruction to gratitude, and that which indeed is a natural effect of the former, is envy. When we grudge the happiness of others, and think God strait-handed, and even injurious to us, because he hath perhaps dealt his blessings more bountifully to them. This I call the effect of pride, because it supposes our own deserts to be equal at least, if not superior to theirs; for so much is plainly implied in every such murmuring and accusing of Providence. And a very evil and common disease this is; for cure whereof I know no better expedient than to turn our reflection the quite contrary way. To consider, I mean, not how many are richer or greater or happier, but how many are more indigent, more despised, more miserable: and these too very probably such sort of persons as we can give no account why they should have less of a kind and indulgent Providence than ourselves. For, alas! would every one look well at home, they all would find abundant cause to admire that patience and long-suffering and liberality which so vastly exceeds their own deserts, without daring to quarrel at those dispensations wherein the rest of the world are concerned.

3. Another very great occasion of unthankfulness arises from want of considering sufficiently how far God is interested in every affair and event of human life. We see (for instance) that study is blessed with wisdom and increase of knowledge; that diligence and frugality end in riches; that courage and conduct and numbers are crowned with victory, and the like: and from hence we are betrayed into a false conclusion, by attributing these successes to those measures as their proper and adequate causes. Then we take one step farther to in-

^m Psalm lvi. 13.
^q 1 Cor. xv. 10. iv. 7.

ⁿ 2 Cor. xii. 2.

^o 1 Cor. xv. 9.
^r Matt. xi. 25; Coloss. ii. 9.

^p Eph. iii. 8; 1 Tim. i. 15.
^s General Thanksgiving.

dulge our vanity, and please ourselves with a notion of being the makers of our own fortunes, and the givers of all these good things to ourselves. But alas! though such be the general and ordinary course of Providence, yet how often does it, as it were, go out of its way by disappointing the most probable expectations, defeating the subtlest contrivances and most laborious pursuits, and crowning the most unpromising attempts with a success which it would have looked like madness but once to have entertained a thought of? All which is intended no doubt to direct us (and every wise and good man will be directed by it) to the acknowledgment of an overruling, though an unseen hand; one that hath not bound itself up in any laws of nature or necessity, but gives or withholds according to its own good pleasure: that leaves no ground for depending upon the wisest and best endeavours, and hath not lost the honour of the action, even when it is most our own. Remarkable to this purpose is that advice of Moses to the Israelites: *When thou hast eaten and art full, then thou shalt bless the Lord thy God for the good land which he hath given thee. Beware that thou forget not the Lord thy God...and thou say in thine heart, My power and the might of mine hand hath gotten me this wealth. But thou shalt remember the Lord thy God: for it is he that giveth thee power to get wealth.*

4. The last cause of ingratitude I shall mention at present is forgetfulness. The blessings of God, it is true, far exceed all the power of recollection; but the more scandalous it is that out of so very many we should reflect upon so very few. Our memories are likewise treacherous; but it is chiefly in those instances which we are not desirous, or think not worth the care of remembering. And it is notably observed by Tully^a, (who undertakes to save the credit of old age in this respect,) that he never yet met with any man so far decayed as to forget how he had disposed of his mortgage deeds and his money. So, did we but rightly esteem the gifts of our Benefactor, they would occur to our thoughts in greater numbers; whereas now a customary bounty quickly grows familiar and neglected. This may and ought by all means to be remedied, by taking pains in the most lively manner to represent to our minds the infinite variety of mercies we receive. Those that seem to be benefits of course, and enjoyed in common with all mankind: those that are national, or local, or domestic, or personal; and these should be recounted very often, because scarce any day passes without some memorable instance, not any to be sure without the renewal, of manifold blessings, in some capacity or other. But those which should always be uppermost in our esteem, and consequently would be so in our thoughts, are the spiritual mercies, *the inestimable love of God in the redemption of the world by Jesus Christ, the means of grace, and the hope of glory.* All these should be nicely observed, justly valued, and seriously considered; and were they so, we should be out of all danger of falling under the reproach of the nine Jews; and daily, hourly, with the humble zeal of that ingenuous Samaritan, should *with loud voices glorify God, and fall down at Jesus*

^t Deut. viii. 10, 17, 18.

^a Cato Major.

his feet, and give him those thanks which to him with the Father and the Holy Ghost do continually belong. To whom therefore be glory for ever and ever. Amen.

THE FIFTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY.

THE COLLECT.

KEEP, we beseech thee, O Lord, thy Church with thy perpetual mercy: and, because the frailty of man without thee cannot but fall, keep us ever by thy help from all things hurtful, and lead us to all things profitable to our salvation; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

THE EPISTLE. Galat. vi. 11.

11 *Ye see how large a letter I have written unto you with mine own hand.*

12 *As many as desire to make a fair show in the flesh, they constrain you to be circumcised; only lest they should suffer persecution for the cross of Christ.*
that by so doing they may avoid persecution for the profession of the Christian faith.

13 *For neither they themselves who are circumcised keep the law; but desire to have you circumcised, that they may glory in your flesh.*
may have the glory of making, even among the Gentiles, proselytes to the ordinances of Moses.

14 *But God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world.*
whose death all carnal and worldly desires are mortified to me, and I to them.

15 *For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision, but a new creature.*
be circumcised or not, but all depends upon the renewal of his heart and life. (See Epist. for sixth Sunday after Trinity.)

16 *And as many as walk according to this rule, peace be on them, and mercy, and upon the Israel of God.*

17 *From henceforth let no man trouble*

12. They who would ingratiate themselves with the Jews press upon you the necessity of circumcision,

13. Not out of any true zeal to the law, which circumcision is an engagement to observe, but that they

14. I, on the other hand, covet no honour but that of knowing and professing Christ, after the example of

15. For under the gospel covenant it is not of any consequence whether a man

17. Let me not therefore

me: for I bear in my body the marks of the Lord Jesus. be any more disquieted about this contention upon the point of the Mosaical law; for I have those marks which prove to what Master I belong; even the persecutions which I endure for my fidelity to Jesus Christ.

18 Brethren, the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Amen.

COMMENT.

THE apostle here concludes his Epistle to the Galatians with giving the true character of their false teachers, and a necessary vindication of his own. Of them he affirms that all the fierceness of their pretended zeal for the rites of Moses was merely a timorous compliance to shelter themselves from the implacable malice of the Jews, who persecuted all those that had the hardiness to preach up the expiration of the law as a dispensation superseded by the death of Christ. Of himself he professes that his end was purely to advance the true Christian religion; that Christ crucified, though a doctrine of great offence to some, was yet to him (as sure it must be to every one who considers what the Son of God vouchsafed to endure for him) his only glory: and that the favour or friendship of men, and all other temporal advantages, were no longer of any consideration with him, since that total subduing all desires of this kind which had rendered them incapable of making, and his own mind of receiving, any farther influences or impressions from that quarter. Which abstractedness of affection, as it reconciled him to any sufferings for the truth's sake, so he expresses it here very emphatically as an effect of Christ's death upon him, in those words, that *the world was thereby crucified to him, and he unto the world.*

What we are to understand by *the world* in this and such like passages of Scripture, I have formerly taken occasion to explain at large^a. To which place if my reader please to cast back his eye, he will easily perceive that *putting off the old man—destroying the body of sin—mortifying the deeds of the body through the Spirit, and our members that are upon the earth—crucifying the flesh with its affections and lusts—being dead to sin—crucified with Christ—and to the world, and the world being crucified to us*, are all of them terms of much the same importance and extent. My design at present is to shew the elegance and propriety of this last metaphor in particular, and why the death our carnal and worldly desires are to be put to should be represented by crucifixion. Of which I think it may suffice very well to assign the three following reasons:

1. First, this is a very significant expression, as it naturally awakens in us a remembrance of our Saviour Christ's death, who, by suffering upon the cross himself, hath left us the greatest example, and the most forcible obligation for dealing thus with our rebellious appetites. Hence it is we find the duty of mortification so industriously urged from this topic. So St. Peter^b: *Forasmuch then as Christ*

^a Epistle for first Sunday after Easter.

^b 1 Pet. iv. 1, 2.

hath suffered for us in the flesh, arm yourselves likewise with the same mind: for he that hath suffered in the flesh hath ceased from sin; that he no longer should live the rest of his time in the flesh to the lusts of men, but to the will of God. So St. Paul^c, very frequently, but more especially in that chapter to the Romans, where he prosecutes that argument at large; telling us that *we are buried with Christ by baptism, as knowing this, that our old man is crucified with him, that henceforth we should not serve sin. For he that is dead is freed from sin.* And again, in the second of this Epistle^d, declaring himself to be *dead to the law, that he might live unto God*, he acquaints us how he came to be so in these words, *I am crucified with Christ*^e.

Thus to imitate their blessed Master is not only the duty but the glory too of Christians. To us is reserved the honour of completing, and of being able to give the finishing stroke to all that our great Redeemer had begun. For the most important and most saving circumstances of his life and death are to be acted over again by and upon our own selves, to secure the full efficacy that God ordained them for. He who brought accomplishment to all preceding laws and revelations, and was the substance of prophecies and types continued for four thousand years together, was yet content to become himself (in some sense and degree) a figure of every private believer. O the admirable mixture of this wisdom and condescension! by which it was contrived that the things impossible to be effected by the strength of man should be undertaken by the eternal and almighty Son of God; and yet that even this undertaking of the Son of God should, as to the success of it in each man's particular case, depend upon something done by himself, as necessary to consummate and crown it.

Such are the advantages of and motives to this duty, arising from the consideration of our blessed Saviour's example. But there is also upon us the strongest obligation possible to deal with the world and the flesh after this manner, upon the account of his being crucified. Any sort of death undergone by him would have engaged us to what went before; but his death was attended with such circumstances of suffering as must needs melt the most rocky heart into compassion, and leave us even lost in wonder and astonishment at his unparalleled humility, invincible meekness, and incomprehensible love. And these reflections pursued a little farther, by representing, not only who it was that endured, but upon what account, will shew the true cause and foundation of all those sufferings to be laid in those very lusts that give the denomination to a carnal and worldly mind. These are the instigators and actors of every crying abomination which required the atonement of his most precious blood. These were *the betrayers and murderers of that Holy One*; the burden that weighed down, and (if I may be allowed so to speak) the wicked hands that *crucified his very soul*, by that horror and amazement which gave him tortures more exquisite than all the anguish of his acutest bodily pains. And are not we the basest and most insensible of all wretches, if this will not provoke us to revenge? if it do not kindle in our breasts an indignation and hatred never to be pacified with any thing less than the

^c Rom. vi. 4, 6, 7.^d See Epistle for sixth Sunday after Trinity.^e Galat. ii. 19, 20.

utter destruction of those his vilest enemies? It is recorded of some of the best kings in Scripture, that the death of those traitors who had murdered their fathers was one of the first instances in which their royal authority was exercised. This was esteemed a necessary act of justice, a pious severity, due to the honour of the injured dead, and the security of the living heir. And if such executions were commendable in them, how shall we answer it to the Prince of life and glory, if the vices that conspired his death escape unpunished? How can we promise ourselves safety if we bear to foster those vipers in our bosom; and, forgetting his wrongs and our own danger, are reconciled to those treacherous mortal foes from whose subtlety and merciless tyranny he died to rescue us? O let us so remember these things as to sharpen our just resentment, and kindle a holy rage in us; that we may disdain all peace, and glut our fury with the utter destruction of these intestine enemies. The more provoking their offence hath been, the more exemplary let their punishment be. Let us then nail them to the cross of Christ by making that the instrument of their death, and sacrificing them to the honour and memory of his bitter passion. For all this the Holy Ghost may well be supposed to insinuate when commanding us to *crucify* and be *crucified* to the flesh and the world.

2. Secondly, the *crucifying* of these was a very proper metaphor, as that was a sure indeed, but withal a very slow and lingering death. The several gospels take notice of this in that passage concerning the two thieves, whose life was still in them after many hours: and therefore, for prevention of recovery and escape, or for quicker dispatch, their legs were broken at taking down from the cross; while of our Saviour it is observed, that *Pilate marvelled if he were already dead*¹, and refused to grant his body till satisfied by the centurion's testimony that it was certainly so. Thus is it likewise with the offenders we are treating of. Subdued and killed they must be; but this conquest asks a great deal of time. Death cannot be given them at one stroke, though never so resolute, never so well directed; but the blows must be followed thick, and many repeated wounds and bruises must go to effecting it. This is not a work of violence, or to be done at a heat, but by frequent buffetings, long diligence, and continual watchfulness. Their strength must be wasted and worn out; recruit and time for breath conveys new life into them. It often happens that they lie for dead, and so tempt us to neglect them; but that appearance of safety is our most fatal overthrow. For we must take good heed that those terms of *mortifying* and *killing* do not betray us into security by mistaken apprehensions of this matter. The evil principle must be so quelled as to put it past the power of acting with any vigour or success; but we can never wholly root out the cause, nor get quit of the first common matter out of which our lusts are formed. We may correct and disable nature, but we cannot annihilate it; for so long as bodies of flesh and sense bear us company, we cannot but continue in a condition of frailty and danger. There is (as I have lately observed) a contrariety of principles in fallen man-

¹ Mark xv. 44, 45.

kind; a difference of ends for our desires, and distinct motives that incline and persuade us. So that one of the two will always govern; and it is our business (in which we have the assistance of the Holy Spirit) to set this bias of nature and passion the right way; to cast the weight on the side of reason and religion, and yield ourselves up to their guidance. Thus the sensual appetites will not have opportunity to rebel; or if they do, the attempt will prove feeble and vain. For they are then killed when no motion or sign of life appears; or when reduced so low that their motions are very rare and faint, and always ineffectual. And in regard the bringing them down to this degree of impotence requires long and continued conflicts, in which they die away by degrees, and hold out even to a miracle; therefore the figure of killing is yet more elegant and lively, and receives a great improvement by determining the kind of death, and specifying in that of crucifixion particularly.

3. This is also very significant, thirdly, if we reflect upon the ignominy and painfulness of that death. A death restrained to the meanest of slaves, and the most scandalous of malefactors. And therefore opposed here to *glorying in any thing but* the cross of Christ, to denote the contempt St. Paul treated the world with, and that all the advantages and allurements of it were vile to the last degree; or, as he elsewhere says, counted but *dross and dung*, in comparison of the *excellency of the knowledge of Jesus Christ*. A death of torments inexpressible, which every violent death must be, in proportion as it is more lingering. Now, in crucifixion, besides that none of the vitals are immediately assaulted, and so nature feels her own leisurely decay, the very weight of the body upon the pierced hands and feet (where a wonderful complication of nerves and sinews render the sense quicker) must needs create an anguish beyond imagination. Thus also the mortifying our corrupt affections must needs (as matters now stand with us) be a mighty force upon nature. Of which our Lord no doubt was sensible when he chose the *cutting off a right hand*, and *plucking out a right eye*^b, as phrases fit to denote the strict restraints and unrelenting severities requisite upon these occasions. This is so far from needing any proof, that each man's own experience teaches it but too well. For one great advantage taken against the self-denying duties of religion is the pretended unreasonableness of contending with nature, and the hardship and barbarity of turning our own daily executioners. But the obligation, and the benefit of doing so, as well as the fallacy of all arguments to the contrary, have had their places of being considered heretofore^c. Nor do they fall within the compass of my present argument, which is only concerned to prove the fitness of the apostle's expression of *crucifying and being crucified* to sin, the flesh, and the world. And of that I hope the particulars now insisted on are evidence sufficient.

^a Phil. iii. 8.

^b Matt. v. 29.

^c Epistle for sixth Sunday after Trinity.

THE FIFTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY.

THE GOSPEL. St. Matth. vi. 24.

24 *No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon.*

true object (ver. 22, 23.), consider, that no man can serve two masters who command contrary things (as God and the world always do) at one and the same time.

25 *Therefore I say unto you, Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on. Is not the life more than meat, and the body than raiment?*

26 *Behold the fowls of the air: for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are ye not much better than they?*

27 *Which of you by taking thought can add one cubit unto his stature?*

quieting cares are of themselves; for if his blessing do not prosper and cooperate with you, all your own endeavours can effect nothing.

28 *And why take ye thought for raiment? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin:*

29 *And yet I say unto you, That even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these.*

30 *Wherefore, if God so clothe the grass of the field, which to day is, and to morrow is cast into the oven, shall he not much more clothe you, O ye of little faith?*

31 *Therefore take no thought, saying, What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed?*

32 *(For after all these things do the Gentiles seek:;) for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things.*

been better instructed concerning the providence of God; both that which is general over all his creatures, and that which is distinguishing and peculiar to his faithful servants.

24. Now to the intent the charity exhorted to before (ver. 19, 20.) may be more cheerfully exercised, and the mind directed to its

25. Be not therefore anxious for the necessities of life; for he that gave that life cannot want either the power or the will to give provisions for sustaining it.

26. Observe what care he takes of living creatures of less value than you in his esteem, and see how needless that solicitude is.

27. And withal see how very ineffectual such dis-

28, 29, 30. Nay, descend yet lower than the animals, and observe the beauties of every field, whose clothing exceeds all the gayeties of art; and is it not a manifest want of faith to suppose that he who thus adorns those vegetables will be unconcerned to furnish men and Christians with needful clothing?

32. These distrusts were much less unbecoming ignorant heathens, but are very

criminal in you, who have

33 *But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you.* 33. Let it therefore be your first care to recommend yourselves to him by doing your duty, and securing the happiness of another life; and the provisions necessary for this life shall be thrown in to you as over measure.

34 *Take therefore no thought for the morrow: for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof.* 34. So unreasonable upon all these accounts it is to distract your thoughts about subsisting hereafter; which is but anticipating your trouble, of which the present time hath always enough to exercise your care.

COMMENT.

THE paraphrase hath intimated how well it agrees with our Lord's design in some passages just before, to restrain the inordinate love and care for the conveniences of this present world. This is done in the Gospel for the day, which consists entirely of arguments directed to that purpose. Upon each whereof I shall observe somewhat very briefly, and then infer from the whole these two points, very necessary to be rightly understood by every man—the nature of that carefulness here forbidden; and the duty of that, which is still not only allowed, but even expected, with regard to these matters.

I begin with our Saviour's arguments intended to abate of our inordinate concern for the things of this world.

I. The first of these is the danger of alienating our hearts from God, and growing negligent in his service, by addicting ourselves to the love and pursuit of temporal advantages. *No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon^k.* The force of this reason turns upon two points; the one implied, the other expressed. First, it is implied that every man hath some master; that is, some object, the love and desire whereof sits supreme in his heart, and is the governing principle of his actions and behaviour. In this sense our Saviour says^l, *Whosoever committeth sin is the servant of sin.* And St. Paul^m, *Know ye not, that to whom ye yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants ye are to whom ye obey?* And St. Peterⁿ, *While they promise them liberty, they themselves are the servants of corruption: for of whom a man is overcome, of the same is he brought in bondage.* Such a state of subjection cannot be separated from the notion and being of any creature whatsoever. For no creature is self-sufficient. And since all naturally desire and labour after happiness, all who have not wherewithal to furnish themselves must seek it in somewhat without them; and whatever it be where they place and hope for it, that is their master. Thence their love, their desire, their fear, their every passion are drawn; thither all their actions and purposes tend; this is the source and this is the end where all they do and suffer meets at last, like lines in their common centre.

^k Ver. 24.^l John viii. 34.^m Rom. vi. 16.ⁿ 2 Pet. ii. 19.

Now from hence plainly follows the second point expressed in the argument here, which is, the impossibility of having more than one such master. For in regard every created mind depends upon happiness from something without itself, it cannot be equally affected toward any other object as this. But all the rest will be valued, either in subordination to it, or declined and detested for their opposition against and inconsistency with it. In the former case the master still retains his dominion, though others, for the sake of their subserviency, are allowed a place in the affections. But in the latter case the ends aimed at are contrary; the methods for attaining them contrary; and therefore, so far as we incline and approach to the one, at so much farther distance are we from the other. Indifference in the point there cannot be, where the ends are contrary; subordinacy of service there cannot be neither, where the ways to them are contrary. And this our Lord declares to be the case between *God* and *mammon*. Both cannot be served; both cannot be loved: for the one is the object of faith, the other of sense; the happiness proposed from the one is spiritual and future and eternal; that which we flatter ourselves with hopes of from the other is sensual and present and transitory. The method of obtaining the one is to be strictly just and holy and good; to look beyond, and in our hearts get above the world: the way to happiness prescribed by the other is to boggle at nothing, though never so base and unjust; to suffer no considerations of religion to restrain or check our pursuits; but to set our hearts and hands and heads continually at work, and resolve to get riches and honour and power and pleasure, how dear soever they cost us here or hereafter.

Meanwhile it seems to me very observable that our Lord here seems to make some difference between *loving the one and hating the other, and holding to the one, and despising the other* of the two masters. For we cannot fairly conclude from what went before, that loving the world in any degree whatsoever is altogether inconsistent with the love of God. The necessities of human life, and the supplies they ask and find from worldly accommodations, make it impossible for a creature, constituted as we are, not to retain a tender regard for the comforts, upon which its subsistence, or at least the ease of it, in so great a measure depends. And that which nature hath made necessary, the God of nature will not condemn as sinful. But we are then only in a criminal sense lovers of the world, when this so entirely possesses our hearts that we have no love left for God. And any exigence, by which these are brought into competition, effectually makes the discovery where our master-passion is placed. For where our affection for both cannot be indulged and gratified, the choosing whether of the two we will prefer and abide by, and whether we are content to forego, is a sufficient evidence of the love and hatred intended by our blessed Lord in the aphorism now before us. And this construction we have his own authority for; who, by saying, *If any man come to me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot*

be my disciple, had no design to insinuate that the becoming void of natural affection was a requisite predisposition to the becoming a good Christian; but only that the dearest things in the world ought not to rival or have the preference above him. For so he clearly explains himself in another evangelist: *He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me: and he that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me.* In short, love and value these we may, provided that affection and esteem keep within its just bounds, and give place to a better and more amiable object. For, in our Saviour's language, not to love more is equivalent to hating; and that which we do not hold to, we are accounted to despise.

But still there is a great deal of danger in indulging even this lawful love of the world. Not only because the objects of it, being sensible and present conveniences, are apt to gain upon our hearts, and engage them farther than we are generally well aware toward that love which is unlawful; but because this is very apt to impose upon us in the judgments we make of our own spiritual state. For many a man, no doubt, is really devoted to the world, who thinks himself not at all so. We generally suppose our hearts right with God, so long as we can reason ourselves into the clear reason and duty of loving him above all things. Whereas, alas! the proofs to be given of this love do not consist in speculative arguments, but in habits and actions. And they who feel no difficulty in concluding that no other object is comparable to God, when in cool blood, and while want keeps at a distance, find themselves quite different sort of persons when the necessities of human nature bring them to the trial, and all the passions conspire to take their part against reason and religion. The only way therefore to secure ourselves against the hazards of any such experiment which it shall please the wisdom of Providence to make upon us, is, not only to satisfy ourselves that there is no manner of proportion between God and the world, but to accustom ourselves continually to fix our desires and affections entirely upon the former; and, even when no danger in competition appears, constantly to be upon our guard, that we suffer no impressions that are very strong and tender to fasten upon our souls, which any events or apprehensions in the affairs of life will otherwise not fail to make with regard to the latter. And for this purpose there cannot a better expedient be thought on than to dwell much upon the warning given us here, that these two masters are of differing and irreconcilable tempers, that the service of both is utterly incompatible, and therefore that good heed is to be taken, lest, by making too near approaches to the service of the world, we insensibly loosen and damp our affections for God; and even when no such consequence is intended, do yet in effect cease to retain any longer to him.

2. Our Lord's second argument against inordinate concern for the things of the world is, that distrust of God's good providence which it manifestly implies. For prevention of which sin we are here directed to two considerations—what he hath already done for ourselves, and what he does continually for his other creatures.

What God hath done already for us is intimated in those words, *Is not the life more than meat, and the body than raiment*? If so, then he that hath power to give the greater cannot want power to give the less; and he that had the goodness to bestow subsistence will not fail to bestow the supplies, without which here we cannot subsist. Our creation was the work of his almighty power; and to make us the more sensible of this, he hath reserved to himself the determination of many accidental qualities in our frame which seem to be of no great importance, except only as they serve for distinctions between one man and another. And yet in these, in appearance small and inconsiderable, circumstances of our bodies, if all our endeavours are not, as manifestly they are not, able to produce the least alteration; (not to add one cubit to our stature, as our Lord here¹, not to make one hair of our head white or black, as he elsewhere expresses it²;) how vain an imagination is it to presume that our sollicitudo is that upon which the preservation of the whole body must depend! how wicked to suppose that his care, who descends to such minute particulars, will not concern itself for matters of greater and much more necessary consideration! For the being he gave us is an effect of his goodness as well as of his power; a pledge that he will, no less than a demonstration that he can sustain us: the very act of giving it did in truth charge us upon him for maintenance; and therefore the Psalmist's connexion and reasoning is very just, *It is he that hath made us, and not we ourselves; we are his people, and the sheep of his pasture*³. Had we made ourselves, then indeed the whole care of keeping ourselves would in all reason lie upon ourselves; but in regard another made us, it is but reasonable he should, and we have no manner of ground to question but he will maintain us.

2. To the inferences made from the things God hath done for ourselves, we are commanded to add those which our own observation of his dealings with other creatures will naturally suggest to us. His *feeding the fowls of the air*; which, as they are not qualified for, so it is plain they have no need of, *sowing and reaping, and gathering into barns*⁴, nor in proportion any of the provident methods employed for the supply and preservation of mankind; his *clothing the lilies and grass of the fields*⁵, with ornaments and beauty far exceeding all the powers of industry and art; these are plain evidences that he is never wanting to furnish necessary supports for every sort of being given by him; and therefore justify our dependence upon the like care, since we are in the same capacity and relation to him; equally his creatures, and therefore equally entitled to his preserving providence as any of these are or can possibly be.

But this argument holds a great deal stronger when we consider what an admirable order God hath ranged his creatures in, and what distinguishing characters of favour and esteem he hath vouchsafed to some of them above others. The birds have indeed an animal life, but this is of no mighty consequence; the flowers have a vegetable life only, are void of sense, and of very short duration: and yet even

¹ Ver. 25.² Ver. 27, and Luke xii. 26.³ Matt. v. 36.⁴ Psalm c. 3.⁵ Matt. vi. 26.⁶ Ver. 28, 29.

that, which whether it continue long or not, is no great matter; and even this, which never was intended, and is not in any possibility to continue long, hath ever since the foundation of the world been thought not unworthy the care of him that made them. But what comparison is there between the utmost excellencies of vegetation and sense, and the faculties of a rational soul? Mankind are made after God's own image, made capable of glorifying him by a voluntary obedience here, made for the enjoyment of immortality hereafter; and therefore, as every wise and good man does, so we have all the reason in the world to believe that God does, proportion his tenderness and concern to the value and dignity of the object. That although every sort of beings be alike his creatures, yet all do not share alike in his providence; but this is extended with a more especial regard to such as are of a more excellent and durable kind.

Nay, the argument runs higher still, when it is remembered that the creatures here mentioned were in great measure designed for the service and entertainment of mankind; consequently God, in taking care of them, takes care of those to whom they minister sustenance and delight; and we have reason to interpret that care as a kindness to ourselves. But nothing can be more absurd than that infidelity which sees so ample provision made for creatures of the meanest endowments and very lowest quality, and at the same time distrusts the Maker of it for such provisions as are absolutely necessary for creatures *much better than they*; for them to whom he hath given dominion over the rest; them for whose use the rest are created. That the rest want nothing for them is plain; so that to suppose we shall be as well dealt by as they are, might suffice to compose all uneasy solicitude for the things of this world. But we have a great deal more for it; for to suppose that we shall be dealt by *but as well as they* is an unbecoming and very faulty reflection upon Providence. Our Saviour's manner of reasoning declares it so to be; *Wherefore, if God so clothe the grass of the field, which to day is, and to morrow is cast into the oven, shall he not much more clothe you, O ye of little faith?*^a

3. A third argument against such inordinate concern is its inconsistency with the principles of the Christian religion. Many among the heathens were wholly ignorant, and none of them had a right understanding, of the nature and providence of God. In them therefore that solicitude was excusable; because suiting the condition of men who were of opinion that knowing no superior power whereon they might safely depend, or that did at all interest itself in their affairs, it stood them in hand to look to themselves. But Christians are instructed that *the mercy of God is over all his works*^a; that it is over mankind especially; that it is over good men after a still more peculiar sort; that *they who fear him lack nothing*^b, and that *from them that live a godly life he will withhold no manner of thing that is good*^c. They are confirmed in these assurances by the relation God vouchsafes to bear to them, such as perceives and kindly considers their wants; for the affection of a father cannot suffer children to perish in their necessities, and the all-sufficiency of a heavenly Father

^a Ver. 30.^a Psalm cxlv. 9.^b Psalm xxiv. 9.^c Psalm lxxiv. 12.

cannot be destitute of means to supply their necessities. Christians again are taught not to set up their hopes and their rest in this world, but to expect their inheritance and happiness in another. If the Gentiles therefore, who had none, or a very dim and confused prospect beyond the grave, laid themselves wholly out upon this only world they knew of, we are not much to wonder; but the Christians' principal concern ought in all reason to be the securing their portion in that future life; and for the present so to attend upon their duty as may engage the favour of God, and justify their contented reliance upon all fitting supplies in their passage, by that *godliness which hath the promises of both lives*^d; and so will approve itself *profitable* to them as well upon the way as at their journey's end. All these motives to a cheerful trust in the good providence of God I take to be included in those words, *After all these things do the Gentiles seek: for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things. But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you*^e.

A fourth argument against this inordinate concern is the needless trouble and torment of it; the torment is implied in the original word, which signifies not every sort of care, but that extreme anxiety which rends the very heart and perplexes the mind, the confusion whereof our Lord describes in a very lively manner by those questions of people distracted in their thoughts, and not knowing which way to turn them—*What shall we eat? what shall we drink? wherewithal shall we be clothed?*^f As if all were lost and desperate, and God could find no way to furnish them. The needlessness of that torment is expressed by *taking thought for to morrow*; harassing our minds with fears and possibilities of want hereafter; and heaping sorrow and labour upon our own heads, by laying upon the present time, which hath as much already as it can well bear, that burden which no way belongs to it. Thus much is imported by our Lord's command, deduced from his whole discourse upon the subject: *Take therefore no thought for the morrow: for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof*^g.

From what hath been said upon the first, it is easy to dispatch my second head in very few words; by showing what sort of care is here forbidden, and what not only allowed, but even expected from us.

1. That care is certainly forbidden which betrays a greater love for the world than for Almighty God. And this we may reckon done, by consenting to any unlawful means to promote our temporal advantage; by retaining any we are already possessed of at the expense of his favour and a good conscience; by following our worldly affairs with delight, and attending his service with weariness and grudging; or by wholly neglecting the latter, rather than miss the least opportunity of prosecuting the former.

2. That concern for the world is here forbidden which puts us upon calling into question the power or the goodness of God, which forgets to be thankful for mercies already received, and neglects the daily instances of his bounty to the world in general; and herein offend all

those querulous and desponding tempers which murmur and complain of Providence, aggravate their sufferings to impatience, and their wants to despair: as if there were no God that governs the world, or they the only things in the universe disregarded by him.

3. That concern for the world is certainly forbidden which makes us regardless of our duty and eternity, places all its endeavours and aims here below, and looks upon the present advantages as its proper happiness. Such as is not content to refer the measure of these to the discretion of that Father above, and acquiesces not in his appointments; but had rather be wealthy and great than righteous, and is induced to virtue more for the promises of this life, than either for the sake of its own intrinsic value, or the rewards to be had by it in a future state.

4. That concern again is forbidden, which is placed on superfluities, and fixes a careful eye upon things a great way off: that will not let the man enjoy himself, for fear he should want several years hence, or his family suffer for it when he is asleep in his grave. Wretched folly! as if God would not be the same powerful and good God then as now, and sufficient to provide for thy children, who hath so long and so plentifully provided for thee. In short, under this particular we may include all that care of the men that are fretful and uneasy, sordid and niggardly, griping and uncharitable.

2. On the other hand, if there be, as no doubt there is, and may be in any of us, such a concern to provide for oneself and family as loves the world in subordination to God, and would not to gain it all do any thing to displease him; and as serves him cheerfully, follows the business of a lawful and useful calling industriously and conscientiously, and labours hard at his business, not because he dares not trust God, but because he dares not tempt him; but still always refers the success of that labour to his disposal, and waits for his blessing patiently and contentedly: a concern that remembers there is a higher to which it must give way, and that the provisions it seeks are only the recruits of a traveller, not the stores of a fixed inhabitant: a concern, lastly, that permits a man to enjoy his present blessings with moderation and thankfulness and an even temper, and trusts God for his future subsistence; is decent in his expenses, hospitable to strangers, friendly to neighbours, just to all, and charitable to the poor:—this is a care and concern for the things of the world which this whole discourse of our blessed Saviour contains not one syllable against; which the Scripture, wheresoever diligence and frugality are commended, and sloth and profuseness discountenanced, plainly encourages and applauds; and which the laws of nature, of human society, and of revealed religion, all agree in demanding of us. And now, how can we consider this matter as it deserves, and sufficiently admire the wisdom and mercy in this kind distribution of our cares? For upon the whole, God forbids the making ourselves uneasy here, to prevent our being miserable hereafter; that care which is of service he hath left us to pursue, and that which can do us no good he hath commanded us to cast upon him; that which promotes the use of our reason, and chooses the properest methods for success by pre-

serving our minds in steadiness and tranquillity, we are allowed ; and of that which brings disorders and perplexity, and perfectly bereaves us of our peace and our conduct, we are debarred. In short, God hath so tempered the matter, that we may neither despair of his blessing nor presume upon subsisting without it ; but use such means as argue not despondency and fear, but an honest application to the duties of our station, and a willing submission to his disposal of events. If therefore our lives be uneasy, let us remember who it is that makes them so ; and not accuse either the ordinances of God or the necessities of nature, but our own selves. For they are then only uneasy when we refuse to follow the directions of our Saviour for serving him without distraction in the one, and reposing our souls upon his fatherly care for all necessary supplies of the other.

THE SIXTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY.

THE COLLECT.

O LORD, we beseech thee, let thy continual pity cleanse and defend thy Church ; and, because it cannot continue in safety without thy succour, preserve it evermore by thy help and goodness ; through Jesus Christ our Lord ^a. Amen.

THE EPISTLE. Eph. iii. 13.

13 *Wherefore I desire that ye faint not at my tribulations for you, which is your glory.* 13. I exhort you by all means not to be discouraged in your duty upon the account of my sufferings, of which you ought to be glad rather, because they are a proof of my sincerity, and a confirmation of the truth of the doctrine I preached among you.

—14 *For this cause I bow my knees unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,*

15 *Of whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named,* 15. Who hath made all the faithful, Jews and Gentiles, the spirits already glorified and those still in a state of trial, sons of God, and so one family, and brethren to the angels.

16 *That he would grant you, according to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man ;*

17 *That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith ; that ye, being rooted and grounded in love,*

^a Eph. iii. 16, &c.

18 *May be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height ;*

19 *And to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fulness of God.*

be endued with the highest measures of your present condition is capable.

20 *Now unto him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us,*

21 *Unto him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end.*

18, 19. That you may have a due sense of that infinite love of God, the full dimensions whereof are too vast for any mortal perfectly to comprehend ; that so ye may all spiritual graces, of which

COMMENT.

THIS epistle is supposed to be written from Rome, in some part of those two years in which St. Paul, though a prisoner, was yet allowed the favour of *dwelling in his own hired house, and of receiving all that came to him*^b. The portion of it read to day consists of two parts ; an exhortation, and a prayer for such additions of grace as might enable the Ephesians to comply with that advice. The former we have at the thirteenth verse ; the latter is continued to the end of the chapter.

1. The matter of the exhortation consists in their *not fainting*, that is, not being shaken in the constancy of their belief, nor discouraged in the practice of those Christian truths which he, when present, had taught among them. A temptation very incident to weak minds, when the doctrine they had embraced lies under persecution, and the persons from whom it was received, by falling under public discountenance, come to make so different a figure as that of St. Paul in bonds at Rome, by the instigation and provailing malice of the Jews, was from the same St. Paul baffling the Jews and working miracles at Ephesus. Against this temptation, which disposes men from the calamities or disgrace of a teacher to abate of their esteem for the man and the matter taught by him, and so to seek pretences for securing themselves in case the danger should come nearer home, he fortifies them by declaring that his *tribulations* were for them, and that they were *matter of glory* to them^c.

By suffering for them, he means, that the very thing which rendered his Jewish enemies implacable was his asserting the privilege of the Gentiles. For this he did by arguing and maintaining openly, that God had now under the gospel laid aside the distinction which formerly obtained, and (as he expresses it) *made the Gentiles fellow-heirs, and of the same body, and partakers of his promise in Christ by the gospel*^d. Consequently, to be now a Jew is so far from confining God's favour to the persuasion such a one is of, that it utterly excludes him

^b Acts xviii. 30.

^c Eph. iii. 13.

^d Ver. 6.

from it; and to have been a Jew before, puts him that comes under this new dispensation upon no better a foot than those stand who come into it from the very dregs of pagan idolatry and ignorance. These declarations the Jews might take offence at, who disdained such a levelling with people held by them in the utmost contempt; but the Ephesians, who found their account and advancement in it, had reason to cherish and be highly delighted with it; consequently, when this was the provocation, they had a particular interest in the sufferings it occasioned, and were obliged by gratitude as well as duty to make the apostle's afflictions for so boldly standing by their rights a very forcible argument for courage and perseverance in that faith to which they stood indebted for their own privileges. Upon the same account he might very justly affirm, that his *tribulations* were their *glory* too. For what could do more credit to their pretensions than their apostle's sufferings in defence of them? Had he been never so peremptory in asserting these during his stay at Ephesus only, where the persons whose advantage was concerned would be ready to protect him, this might have looked like an artifice to ingratiate himself by exalting them; but constantly to persist in avowing the same rights, doing it to the very heads of those adversaries that would least endure it, submitting to and being in no degree intimidated with insults and injuries, violence and tumults, bonds and imprisonment; this must remove all ground of jealousy, and prove that one so much in earnest was fully satisfied, not only in the truth, but in the consequence of the principle he suffered for. This must in all reason be a strong confirmation, not of that single point alone, but of all the rest in which he had instructed them. And the Ephesians might well think it an honour done them, and an indispensable engagement to continue firm in their profession; after the highest evidences of his sincerity and consistence with himself, by whose zeal their first conversion to so advantageous a faith had been effected, and the glorious expectations consequent to that conversion so abundantly justified and established.

These arguments are certainly perfectly well fitted for the apostle's purpose; but the best arguments in matters of this nature cannot by their own strength produce the intended effect. Our Collect for the day (alluding possibly to the scripture now before us) acknowledges that *the church* (and the same is true of every member of it) *cannot continue in safety without God's succour*; his *help and goodness* are absolutely necessary to *preserve* us; which they very often do, by giving force and efficacy to those arguments by which our teachers urge us to a necessary care for preserving ourselves. St. Paul therefore, in the following words, declares that the matter of this advice to his people was likewise the subject of his earnest petition to God. And here again we may observe the nature of those graces he asked for them, and the end to which he prayed the grant of them might be serviceable. These, with the title given to God at the beginning, and the doxology at the end, make the substance of the remainder of the Epistle for the day.

The general matter of his request is, that they, *according to the*

riches of God's glory, might be strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man^c. By the *inner man*, no doubt, is meant the mind or soul; that invisible but essential and principal part, which is contradistinguished to the outward and visible, our body. Thus both are plainly in the same text, where this apostle, recounting a great variety of afflictions, and the supports he found under them, says, *We faint not; but though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day*^d. This *inner man* differs from the *new man*, as the faculty does from its subject. The latter is a complication of Christian virtues and graces; the former is the seat in which they reside and act. The latter are the instruments of our change, the former is that part upon which the change is wrought; they renew, this is *the spirit of the mind renewed* by them^e.

St. Paul prays therefore, that the Holy Ghost would convey into the minds of his Ephesians such additions of divine grace as might be a sufficient preservative against temptations and infirmities; that he would increase their abilities to resist and overcome, in proportion as their conflicts and their necessities increase; which he calls *strengthening with might*. And that this might be in such abundance as is answerable to the exceeding greatness of that power which enables, and of that goodness which disposes God to liberality, in supplying all the exigencies of his faithful servants. For such exuberance of bounty, I conceive, is meant by the strength of the Spirit being; distributed *according to the riches of his glory*.

The effects of which are, (1.) *Christ's dwelling in their hearts by faith*. Our Lord had said^h, *If a man love me, my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode him*. And St. Paul, in the close of the second of this Epistle, says, *Christians are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit*ⁱ. From hence it appears that the communication of the grace of that Spirit, which is inseparable from the Father and Son, is the manner of their *dwelling in men's hearts*. But this must not be understood of every sort of communication, but such a plentiful and permanent one as answers to a fixed abode; when Christ takes entire possession of us, and all our affections are subject and devoted to him; when our faith is firm and constant, and the only principle whereby we are governed, so as to value and desire nothing in comparison of what he would have us do, and hath promised to give us.

(2.) This is followed by *being rooted and grounded in love*, that is, so fervent a love of God as (like a tree that is set deep and hath taken strong hold, and a house whose foundation is broad and firm and well wrought) is not to be shaken by the most violent storms of adversity and persecutions. And that the firmness here mentioned may be effectually attained, he prays that they may be able to *comprehend* the vast dimensions of God's love to them; the wonderful mercy of redeeming the world by the death of his Son; the boundless and surprising mercy of admitting all mankind (Gentiles as well as Jews) to the knowledge and every benefit of this mysterious love; which when St. Paul declares to be such as *passes knowledge*, and yet at the same

^c Ver. 16.^d 2 Cor. iv. 16.^e Eph. iv. 24, 25.^h John xiv. 23.ⁱ Eph. ii. 21.

time begs that they may *know* it, the seeming inconsistency of these expressions may be accounted for as follows. Either, (1.) that this is the most excellent subject that the thoughts can dwell upon, and more worthy their study than any other sort of knowledge whatsoever: or, (2.) that this is a subject too large and lofty for human powers to know, and can only be known by the supernatural illuminations of God's own Spirit: or else, (3.) (as the word *know*^k is sometimes applied to the affections, and not the understanding only) that a deep, affectionate, and thankful sense of a mercy which mortal men cannot conceive the full value and extent of, will inflame them with so fervent a love in return, as shall esteem nothing too much to be done or suffered for the service of him who hath so wonderfully loved them; but shall put them upon aspiring to the very highest pitch of piety and virtue and grace, that any mortal men are capable of coming up to; and so of being *filled with all the fulness of God*.

These are effects so very extraordinary in themselves, so very important to the parties interceded for, that the apostle thought it requisite to mention the person addressed to under such characters as might satisfy his Ephesians that they would not be asked in vain. To this purpose the inclination to give is implied, in calling God *the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, of whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named*^l. For he, who without any distinction or reserve had admitted those Gentiles into equal privileges with his once peculiar children and people, and by his blessed Son had enlarged his family, incorporated all nations of believers, all that ever were or should be glorified spirits in heaven, into one brotherhood and body, could not be imagined backward in granting any spiritual assistances useful and necessary for accomplishing those kind intentions toward them. And though the effects mentioned here require a very strong operation, yet to take off all apprehensions from that quarter, he declares that God, by *the power that worketh in us*^m, (the invincible force of his Holy Spirit in our hearts,) can, if he pleases, do not only what St. Paul had here prayed he would do, but *exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think*. So reasonably might they hope not only for these, but even for greater blessings and graces, if God should see such needful and proper for their circumstances.

--The uses fit to be made of this scripture are several; particularly, we should learn from hence not to think at all the worse of good persons and good principles, when they fall under discountenance or persecution. To confirm our adherence to such, by considering the advantages accruing to the truth, from the opposition of its enemies and the sufferings of its friends. We should acknowledge our constancy in these, and our virtue in all cases, to be God's gift, and the strength by which we stand not our own, but his. We should be perpetually labouring to possess our hearts with a more and more vigorous and thankful sense of the mercies we enjoy by Jesus Christ; and to make our love and zeal for so gracious a Father and Benefactor as fervent, as constant, as dutiful as may be. And what assistances soever we want for these purposes, we are here instructed where to

^k Matt. vii. 23; John x. 15.^l Eph. iii. 14, 15.^m Ver. 20.

apply for them; what encouragements we have to ask, and what assurance to receive. Which when it is our happiness to do, St. Paul is in the last place our example for rendering thanks to him, who, because he hath laid the foundations of a church to endure throughout all ages, ought certainly to have glory given him in the church throughout all ages, by Christ Jesus. Amen.

THE SIXTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY.

THE GOSPEL. St. Luke vii. 11.

11 *And it came to pass the day after, that he went into a city called *Nain; and many of his disciples went with him, and much people.*

12 *Now when he came nigh to the gate of the city, behold, there was a dead man carried out*, the only son of his mother, and she was a widow: and much people of the city was with her.*

13 *And when the Lord saw her, he had compassion on her, and said unto her, Weep not.*

14 *And he came and touched the bier: and they that bare him stood still. And he said, Young man, I say unto thee, Arise.*

15 *And he that was dead sat up, and began to speak. And he delivered him to his mother.*

16 *And there came a fear on all: and they glorified God, saying, That a great prophet is risen up among us; *and, That God hath visited his people.*

17 *And this rumour of him went forth throughout all Judæa, and throughout all the region round about.*

11. *A small city in the tribe of Issachar, not far from the Lesser Hermon.

12. *It not being lawful for the Jews to bury within any of their cities, because all dead bodies were by the law unclean.

16. By virtue of that divine power wherewith this authoritative command was attended, - he that was dead—

16. *That God had now sent the Messiah indeed. See this phrase manifestly so used, Luke i. 68.

COMMENT.

THE miracles of our blessed Master are generally works of mercy and compassion, and that of this day is eminently so; there being few if any instances that called for them which the evangelists have represented in circumstances more fitted to move pity. The parting with a beloved child is at any time an affliction that in tender mothers stirs a very sensible concern; but when time and acquaintance have endeared their conversation, when we have not only enjoyed the diversions of their childhood, but the promises of their youth, and begun to conceive just hopes of their attainments and prosperity, after

that a few years more have ripened them for the world; all these considerations add weight to the blow.

But that which here drove it deeper is, that this *young man was the only son of his mother*ⁿ: no remnant left behind to mitigate or to supply the loss; no remembrance of her travail left, but that most uncomfortable one, of fears and pangs undergone to increase the number of the dead and her own sorrows.

And yet the most melancholy aggravation is still behind; which St. Luke therefore reserves for the last place, by acquainting us that *she was a widow*. A state of all others the most friendless and forlorn, and for this reason frequently mentioned in Scripture as that which God receives into his more peculiar protection. If any other comfort belong to this condition, it arises commonly from the children which God hath spared. These are so many living images of a deceased father; they succeed into his cares, and in some measure fill his place by comforting and assisting a solitary mother. These are the *arrows in the hand of the giant*^o, that defend their aged parents from violence and wrong; and by enlarging the interest of a family, enable them to bear up against any adversaries that shall contend with them. But when the quiver is empty, and these arrows all broke and spent, how easy is it then to insult over and crush a weak woman! She stands naked and childless, without any help or sanctuary except in that kind and tender God, who, in consideration of these miseries and dangers, engages that he will be, and by his ready relief to such persons proves himself to be, their most affectionate husband and never-failing friend.

Such was the case of this mournful widow, bereaved of her husband, bereaved of her son, in the bloom and vigour of youth, when just at a condition of repaying a mother's past tenderness and trouble by becoming the stay and support of her age and her infirmities. This complication of miseries the merciful Jesus saw, and felt, and relieved, by turning her tears into joy; and in an instant, by one commanding word, delivered the young man back healthful and strong to his mother. This is the state of the case now before us: which very naturally suggests these two reflections for our improvement and advantage.

I. The wisdom of God, in sometimes suffering his servants to be driven to extremities past all human help.

II. His goodness, in comforting and delivering them when reduced to this deplorable state. With the former head I will content myself now; and shall speak to the second upon a like occasion shortly P.

I. Let us then at present observe the wisdom of God in suffering his servants sometimes to be driven to extremities past all human help. That question of some Jews concerning Lazarus is equally applicable to this youth of Nain: *Could not he, which opened the eyes of the blind, have caused that even this man should not have died?*^p No doubt he could. It was in his power to have prevented his sickness, or to have checked the beginnings of his distemper, or to have given success to any applications used for his recovery, or to have called

ⁿ Ver. 12.

^o Psalm cxvii. 4.

^p Gospel for the twenty-fourth Sunday after Trinity.

q John xi. 37.

him back at the last gasp, and respited the execution of the fatal sentence upon him. He that afterwards did much more, thereby shewed plainly he could have done that which was less. So is it likewise in the power of God to contrive us a smooth and easy passage through the world; to secure us from dangers and calamities, as well as to support us under them; to shorten our affliction by blessing the endeavours we employ to deliver ourselves; nay, or to deliver us without our own endeavours by some wonderful interposition of his good providence.

But that which God's power can do, his wisdom often sees fit not to do. He makes this life a valley of tears to his servants; he sees them struggle with their distresses in vain; and when they feel their impotence, and cry for help to him their only refuge, he seems to stand by unconcerned, and turn the deaf ear: so that they cannot perceive any inclination in him to pity their distresses or to answer their prayers, to bless ordinary means or to succour them with extraordinary.

And yet, as disagreeable as all this carriage may appear to the notions of a God whose brightest and darling attribute is mercy, and of a Providence universally watchful and kind, there is a very rational and fair account to be given of it; such as may satisfy any who will consider the ends of affliction, and the uses it is designed to serve. For the difficulty itself supposes that none of those things happen to us by chance; the very ground of the difficulty lieth in that appearance of contrariety between the supposed hardship of these dispensations and the infinite goodness of that Being at whose disposal they are confessed to lie. These therefore must be looked upon, not abstractedly as they are in themselves, but with respect to the purposes they are appointed for. And as such, nothing more is needful to reconcile men to them, than a persuasion that the ends they promote are desirable and good, and worthy the wise Governor of the world; and that these are means exceeding proper for promoting those ends.

1. Look upon them as remedies for the cure of our vices, the correcting our passions, and giving check to those luxuriant appetites, which, like the peccant humours in our bodies, must be taken down by hard usage and restraint: and thus the continuance or increase of an affliction may be as necessary as the first application of it. For as all tempers and diseases are not alike, so it is impossible the same dose should relieve every one alike. They who are of easy constitutions, or whose illness hath not taken deep root, will be recovered by short and gentle methods; but if the sickness have got head, and the whole mass be tainted, this case requires a sharp and long course. Thus if a man be of a good flexible disposition, willing to hear reason, content to be told his faults, and upon correction inclined to do better, a small measure of adversity will suffice to bring him to himself; but if the heart be tough and sturdy, naturally stiff, or hardened by customary sinning, it is not without great difficulty that such a one is reclaimed. The medicine then which failed at first giving must be repeated, and mixed stronger and stronger till it take

effect. And as it is no reflection upon the good nature of a physician to prescribe very painful remedies, and not spare for the patient's complaining when life lies at stake, so it would not be kindness, but cruelty in God to be moved by the prayers of his suffering servants, and so release them before their spiritual health be recovered. Nay, in case a light or short affliction cannot make this cure, it is even pity and tenderness to lay on more, and to let them lie longer.

2. Consider afflictions, secondly, as a trial of our virtues, and a proof of our sincerity; and in this regard both the weight and the continuance of them is very reconcilable to the wisdom and justice and goodness of God. For the rewards hereafter are proportioned to the services here: and there is not one difficulty in the discharge of our duty which shall be passed over unregarded at the last great day of account. In regard then our sufferings are but for a *moment* in comparison, and the advantage of them is *eternal*; since they are but *light*, and yet *work out for us a far more exceeding weight of glory*; we have reason rather to bless than repine at the severity of that discipline, which by brightening our virtue contributes at the same time to the brightening our crown. And these are things not to be brought about by slight and short calamities. For it requires but moderate attainments in piety to manage a small adversity, if it endure long; or a sharp one if it pass quickly off. But that which distinguishes the true and the brave Christian from the counterfeit or the vulgar one is patience and perseverance; bearing up and being *faithful unto the end*; never fainting under or growing weary of doing well and suffering evil, in any instance that the will of his great Master shall think fit to require from him.

These two reasons are of very great weight, sufficient to silence any murmurs against an afflicting providence, could they be fairly heard. For this ever designs either the chastisement of some evil or the exercise and improvement of some good in us. But I must own there is yet another reason for the point I am upon, which appears to bear a much nearer relation to the circumstances of this miracle from whence it was deduced. And that is,

3. Thirdly, the doing right to God's own honour by making men duly sensible how absolutely they depend upon him, and whence it is that all their deliverances do really come. Now this is what we are exceeding apt to forget, and yet what is highly necessary to be remembered. So that we are not to wonder if more than common pains be taken to refresh our memories in so very material a point. Had this young man never been sick at all, or had he been but slightly indisposed, the preservation of his health would probably have been ascribed to his temperance, and the confirming of it to early and prudent care. Had the disease grown dangerous, and the cure in appearance desperate, but yet a change had happened beyond all expectation; even thus God Almighty would have come in for but a small share. The skill of the physician, some seasonable and sovereign remedy, strength of nature, a happy crisis, or some such poor pretence, would have gone away with all or far the greatest part of the glory. But

when the youth was actually dead, past all remedies and all hopes; seen and known to be so by his neighbours, his relations, his mother above all, who cannot be thought to give her only son up to the grave till his death was past a doubt; then for restoring him there was but one way remaining, even this amazing one used by our Saviour; such as immediately proved its Author and his omnipotence; such as struck all that saw it with wonder and terror; naturally put them upon *glorifying God*, and proclaiming to all the world that he had now *visited his people* indeed in a very astonishing manner.

The circumstances of mankind in general bear no very distant relation to the case before us. Moderate afflictions make but little impression; they are soon conquered and soon forgotten. The greater create much uneasiness, and that uneasiness awakens our care: but so long as prudence and good management stand us in any stead, so long we are inclined to flatter ourselves with the credit of our escape. But when the waves are ready to swallow us up, when the pilot's skill and the mariner's toil are of no farther use, and all we can do with the vessel is to let her drive; if then (as David expresses it*) after *his indignation hath lain hard upon us*, and *he hath vexed us with all his storms*, God do by some surprising providence *draw us out of the deep*, that *we sink not*, and *set us upon our high places*†; all heaven opens, the Divinity displays itself clearly, and every one that sees it presently cries out, *This hath God done*, for they plainly perceive that it is *his work*‡.

Nor does this reflection extend to such things only as are above probable means, and out of the reach of human helps: but it teaches us also to make a right judgment of others in which those means may seem to challenge a part. It convinces us that our utmost care and contrivance come short; that we can neither advance nor secure ourselves without the favourable concurrence of the Most High. It verifies the Psalmist's observation in the most ordinary events of life; that *except the Lord build the house, their labour is but lost that build it*§; and *except his never-slumbering eye keep the city, the watchman waketh but in vain*¶. Thus we are referred to a higher, to the true cause of all our successes, and directed to ascribe all to him who is the sole disposer of all our gifts. For our diligence and wisdom he uses only as his instruments. And we must use them too as second and subordinate means to invite and qualify us for his blessing. But that blessing nevertheless it is, upon which the whole of our affairs and the last result of every thing entirely depends.

This now I take to be a very natural and evident inference from the case under our present consideration; and such as implies too that we are obliged to patience and submission in all God's appointments concerning us. Grievous to human nature sufferings must be, but the glory of God and our own good are ends that ought to be an overbalance to any natural aversions or infirmities. He who ordains them does not want affection for us; he will impose no hardships upon his children that might conveniently be spared; and therefore

* Psalm lxxviii.

† Psalms xviii. and xl.

‡ Psalm liiv.

§ Psalm cxvii.

¶ Psalm cxli.

the same reason holds for acquiescing in the sharpest extremities as in the shortest and lightest of our troubles: for his appointment is as much concerned in the degree and duration as in the kind and purpose of our sufferings. This obligation holds in prospect of increasing our reward hereafter. But it frequently happens that we are not left to sustain ourselves with so distant a comfort. For this passage, I took notice, suggests a second observation concerning *the goodness of God in comforting and delivering his servants when reduced to the most deplorable circumstances*: which will find a fit opportunity for being considered hereafter.

THE SEVENTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY.

THE COLLECT.

LORD, we pray thee that thy grace may always prevent and follow us, and make us continually to be given to all good works; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen^a.

THE EPISTLE. Eph. iv. 1.

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|--|--|
| 1 <i>I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called,</i> | 1. I therefore, who am in prison for the sake of Christ and his gospel, conjure you |
| to live like men sensible of the blessing, and agreeably to the profes- | |
| sion of Christianity. | |
| 2 <i>With all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love;</i> | 2. Be humble and gentle, patient under injuries, not angry or contentious. |
| 3 <i>Endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.</i> | 3. Labouring to preserve concord and unity in opinion and judgment by this unity of affection. |
| 4 <i>There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling;</i> | 4. To which these that follow are indispensable obligations; that the church |
| of Christ is one body, that his Spirit is as the one soul animating that body; that we all aim at and expect one reward; | |
| 5 <i>One Lord, one faith, one baptism,</i> | 5. Acknowledge one Master, profess one faith, are initiated by one baptism; |
| 6 <i>One God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all.</i> | 6. Are sons of the same Father, whose majesty is over all, whose providence orders all, and whose graces are in you all. |

COMMENT.

THE Epistle consists of two parts. The first, an exhortation to such dispositions and behaviour (more particularly toward each other)

^a Gospel for the twenty-fourth Sunday after Trinity.

^b Eph. iii. 16, &c. Phil. ii. 13.

as becomes Christians. The second, a description of that unity in the church which is the great enforcement of St. Paul's exhortation. The former I have had occasion to treat of so frequently, and of the latter so fully on the first Sunday after Epiphany, that I cannot think it needful to detain my reader any longer upon them at this time.

THE SEVENTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY.

THE GOSPEL. St. Luke xiv. 1.

1 *And it came to pass, as Jesus went into the house of one of the chief Pharisees to eat bread on the sabbath day, that they watched him.*

several of the company, how he would behave himself upon the following occasion.

2 *And, behold, there was a certain man before him which had the dropsy.*

3 *And Jesus answering spake unto the lawyers and Pharisees, saying, Is it lawful to heal on the sabbath day?*

4 *And they held their peace. And he took him, and healed him, and let him go;*

5 *And answered them, saying, Which of you shall have an ass or an ox fallen into a pit, and will not straightway pull him out on the sabbath day?*

make yourselves no scruple to do acts of mercy in much less important cases.

6 *And they could not answer him again to these things.*

7 *And he put forth a parable to those which were bidden, when he marked how they chose out the chief rooms; saying unto them,*

8 *When thou art bidden of any man to a wedding, sit not down in the highest room; lest a more honourable man than thou be bidden of him;*

9 *And he that bade thee and him come and say to thee, Give this man place; and thou begin with shame to take the lowest room.*

10 *But when thou art bidden, go and sit down in the lowest room; that when he that bade thee cometh, he may say unto thee, Friend, go up higher: then shalt thou have worship in the presence of them that sit at meat with thee.*

11 *For whosoever exalteth himself shall*

1. Going to dine with a ruler of the first quality, by sect a Pharisee, Jesus was very narrowly observed by

5. It is true, doing cures on the sabbath day is what I have often been blamed by you for; and yet you

11. My design in this pa-

be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted. rable is to let you see that humility is commanded and respected by God and man; and that to assume more than one's due is the certain way to lose what one aims to get by it.

COMMENT.

ONE great reason why many who read scripture history very much do yet make improvements by no means answerable to their time and pains, is certainly this; that men usually content themselves with a general knowledge of facts related there, without descending to a nice examination of the circumstances and manner of performing those facts. Whereas here it is chiefly that the beauty and advantage of all history lies; these, rightly judged and aptly applied, are the parts best qualified to inform our understanding, to season all our conversation with prudence, and all our behaviour with decency.

To be told for the purpose, as here we are, that our Lord healed a man sick of the dropsy; what is this, added to his other miracles, but as a single drop to the ocean? But to discern and make proper remarks upon his conduct in that whole affair; with what precaution and management, with what courage and resolution, with what condescension and temper he proceeded; this is of great and general use, and may prove an excellent pattern in our lives and conversations. These therefore I design at present to insist upon; not merely for the sake of those rules and reflections to be gathered from the words now before us, but in hopes by the pregnancy of this one passage to engage your more curious attention to others of the like nature.

To set this matter clear, let it be observed, that as our Lord was to dine with a Pharisee of some eminence, the company *watched him*: with a malicious and wicked intent, no doubt, to make some advantage from this treacherous civility of theirs. Two things occurred to cherish such expectations; the presence of a dropsical man, and its being the sabbath day. Hence naturally would arise this difficulty, that, either by forbearing to heal at that time, Jesus would betray his fear, and strengthen their superstitions with regard to such ritual observations; or else by doing it he must incur the censure and odium of a sabbath-breaker and contemner of the law. He, who was well aware what spies he had upon him, so ordered the affair as to accomplish what he saw fit, without any opportunity given for his enemies to compass their ends by it. In the wisdom of which management each of the verses just now read furnishes a particular well worthy our imitation.

I. The first is, a prudent caution not to give offence to them who we know are apt and willing to take it. For so did Jesus by pre-facing his cure with that question, *Is it lawful to heal on the sabbath day?* ver. 3.

II. The second is, resolution in doing good when we have power and a fit opportunity, though sensible that such good is like to give some offence, or bring us into some danger. For though those pretended miracles of the law *held their peace*, and in wicked subtlety

would determine nothing, yet *Jesus took the sick man, and healed him, and let him go* ^b.

III. The third is, condescension and meekness, not insisting too rigorously upon being in the right, nor satisfying ourselves always with that; but taking all fit occasions to vindicate our actions from offence, though never so unreasonable, never so unjustly taken. And thus our Lord defends his whole proceeding from the Jews' own practice, and the tenderness even to brute beasts, which they made no scruple of expressing by all instances of reasonable reliefs even on the sabbath day ^c.

I. I begin with our blessed Saviour's caution, not to give offence to them whom he knew apt and willing to take it: which I gather from his putting first that question, whether it were *lawful to heal on the sabbath-day* ^d. It is not to be thought this case was put to satisfy any scruples in our Lord concerning the lawfulness of that action; but, by offering thus to argue the point, to gain an advantage from their insidious silence, which could not have been had by not putting the question at all. This took off all imputation of rashness and obstinacy and peremptoriness in his own opinion. The act of healing had been equally lawful without it; but the manner of it had not been equally prudent. And hence we see that our Lord in his behaviour did not only consider what in strictness might be done; but what would look well, and how every thing might be ordered so as to look best when it was done.

This then is an admirable precedent for us to follow. It shews what respect is due to the good opinion of others, and what care should be taken for obtaining and preserving it. No motive, with respect to the advantages of this world, could more powerfully recommend the practice of virtue, than that it procures *favour and good understanding in the sight of God and man* ^e. Yet so perverse are some, and so unlucky others, that even virtue itself cannot always keep clear of detraction and contumelious treatment. That vice and shameless lewdness should meet with general condemnation and reproach is highly reasonable; because such things bid defiance to religion and the laws; they contradict and affront the sober sense of mankind; they are so vile in their nature, and so pernicious in their consequences, that none can approve them without guilt, or favour them without censure. If therefore the gall of envenomed tongues would be content to shed itself upon the profane and profligate only, as our wonder could not be great, so neither were the matter very great; because such men receive but the due reward of their evil deeds. But every one who knows the world at all cannot but be sensible that defamation does not use to stop at manifest, no, nor at suspected vice, but flies boldly at the face of virtue itself; and the most upright, the most circumspect Christians cannot absolutely escape the bitterness of the slanderer and backbiter.

This is deservedly looked upon as a very grievous misfortune, and an evidence how unreasonable as well as uncharitable the persons we have to deal with are. And so, generally speaking, no doubt it is:

^b Ver. 4.^c Ver. 5.^d Ver. 3.^e Prov. iii. 4.

but yet I dare not take upon me to say that it is always so; for many good men, who look upon these evil-speakings as a sort of martyrdom which their innocence is called to suffer, would perhaps, upon a nicer examination of the matter, find these, many times, to be not altogether their fate, but in some degree their fault: for there is a mighty difference between approving ourselves to God and to men. God sees our intentions; he accepts our endeavours; he considers what it is we would do; he makes allowances for what we cannot do. But our brethren see the outward circumstances only, and form a judgment from thence. They have neither a faculty of discerning our thoughts and desires, nor good nature enough to allow for them if they could discern them. They reason backward; conclude a fault in the design from a failure in the means; and when we can do no better, pronounce that we never intended to do better. In short, to gain the favour of God, it suffices that we be innocent; to lose that of men, we need only be indiscreet. So nice and ticklish a thing is reputation; so great, so common a difference we find between a clear credit and a clear conscience.

Abundance of defects in truth there are which render even piety and virtue itself less agreeable and engaging to those with whom we converse. If a man's zeal be intemperate and furious; if he be stiff, and so tenacious of his own opinions as to run all to rigour and extremity against those of a contrary judgment; if he be credulous, and easy to receive ill impressions; if fierce, and addicted to dispute and contradiction; if he stretch Christian liberty to its utmost point of lawfulness, or be a severe censurer of them who carry it farther than himself; if, either through want of better breeding or better temper, he fail in the respects or condescensions due to the persons with whom he is concerned; if he be of a disposition inquisitive and busy, and apt to intermeddle in affairs not properly his: these and sundry other mismanagements there are of which men, good in the main, are frequently guilty, that naturally raise a spirit of opposition and prejudice, and cast a blemish upon the honestest intentions and most commendable undertakings.

Now such inconveniences it should be every man's concern to ward off as well as he can. For we are often called upon in Scripture to be *wise as well as harmless*^f; to *adorn as well as to practise the doctrine of our Lord Jesus Christ*^g; to consider ourselves in the midst of a *crooked and perverse generation*^h; enemies to goodness; curious to find any objections against it, and glad when they have found them. In a word, after our Saviour's example here, *to cut off occasion from them that seek occasion*ⁱ, by giving all diligence, not only that what we do be good in itself, but so softened and recommended by decency and prudence, that even our good may not be evil spoken of. For there is a duty incumbent upon us toward one another; toward even the weak and mistaken; toward even the malicious and ill-disposed, as well as to ourselves and to Almighty God. A duty not of equal force, it is confessed; for when both cannot be pleased, God must be obeyed, though all mankind be dissatisfied. And therefore, when all advisable

^f Matt. x. 16.^g Tit. ii. 9.^h Phil. ii. 15.ⁱ 2 Cor. xi. 12.

measures have been taken to render our proceedings not only harmless but blameless too, if this will not conciliate approbation and esteem, we must follow our Saviour on a little farther, and take him for our pattern of courage as well as caution. For that is the

II. Second remark upon the words, resolution in doing good, when we have power and a fit opportunity, notwithstanding any prospect of offence to be taken, or hazard to follow upon it. Thus, though the Pharisees *held their peace*, out of a malicious design to ensnare him, yet he who, without their advice, knew what was proper to be done, *took the sick man, and healed him, and let him go*^k.

To enslave our consciences so far as to do no good which will give distaste, were to debase and destroy virtue, by submitting it to the opinion of men. On the other hand, to attempt the doing good by an over-eager and impetuous officiousness, this, upon some occasions, turns to ill account, both for ourselves and for religion. Hence it is, that to having the power, I added the having a fit opportunity; such a one, I mean, as a wise and good man will judge favourable for obtaining the end of his action. Hence that rule of the casuist's takes place, that the negative precepts oblige at all times, but the affirmative do not. For no conjuncture of circumstances can ever make it warrantable to commit evil; but many may bear us out in omitting good, and dispense with that which is evidently unseasonable and unprofitable, as effectually as if it were utterly impracticable.

Indeed, where plain duty calls, and God and our consciences only are concerned, no excuse ought to suffice us, because the acceptance and effect of our endeavours are in such cases certain. But where that acceptance and effect must turn upon other people, there we are at liberty to consider the probabilities of succeeding, and to employ or spare our pains accordingly. Thus brotherly admonition and reproof is a very Christian, a very useful, and a very kind office; and yet our Lord seems plainly to dispense with it when those we are to treat with are so brutish as to *trample such pearls under foot, and turn again, and rend us*^l. The winning over proselytes to the faith of Christ is a work which one would think the apostles under the highest engagements incessantly to labour in; yet even these were directed, when one city would not receive their instructions kindly, to leave it, and carry the gospel to another^m. The ground of both which cases seems to be this, that others have then our success entirely at their disposal; that no man is therefore bound to lose himself in the service of them, upon whom, after his utmost care and zeal, it will depend whether any service shall be done them or not. For indeed, strictly speaking, when our attempts may be rendered fruitless at the pleasure of those we treat with, not only the opportunity but the power to do good is wanting.

The instance now before us is of a kind somewhat different from this, and therefore a direction for our behaviour when some good may be done, though at the expense of envy and ill construction. The malice of these Pharisees could not bind the hands of Omnipotence; and the cure of this patient was an act of mercy far an overbalance to

^k Luke xiv. 4.

^l Matt. vii. 6.

^m Matt. x.

all their most invidious reflections upon it. Cure him therefore Jesus did; and he hath herein set us a pattern not to desist from, or be discouraged in, actions truly commendable and profitable, for any thing the world shall say or think of us or them. What hath been already delivered on this head will indeed justify our forbearing attempts which can do no good at all; but where some good may be done, there we are to consider of what proportion and consequence that good is. And if, upon laying all circumstances together, the benefit be certain, the inconvenience doubtful; the good of great, the evil of less importance; the good what we are fairly called to do, the evil such as will never happen to us, except others do what they ought not to do; then we are to cast ourselves upon God's protection, boldly and bravely to discharge our conscience, and to trust him with the event. The argument which acquits us from tempting unseasonable, unprofitable, and consequently unnecessary difficulties, is of no weight to justify our cowardice or our sloth. It therefore highly concerns every man to deal sincerely with his own breast, where matters are left at large for Christian prudence to judge of; not to aggravate hardships beyond the truth, but to consider and determine and act as one sensible he must give an account; and that however men, or even himself may, yet God is not, cannot be mocked.

From persons arrived thus far, nothing more, one would imagine, should be required. Caution not to give offence before we act, and integrity and resolution and wisdom in acting, seem to set us above misrepresentation; and that we might, with a generous contempt, look down upon any impotent cavils and aspersions that may be cast at us. Yet so did not the blessed Jesus: he set us also,

III. Thirdly, a pattern of condescension and meekness in vindicating this action from offence, though most unreasonable, most unjustly taken. To this purpose he vouchsafes to argue the point with these Pharisees, by urging their own practice upon them, ver. 5; *Which of you shall have an ass or an ox fallen into a pit, and will not straightway pull him out on the sabbath day?* Upon occasions like this, nothing is more usual than for people to grow sullen and peremptory; to allege, with St. Paul, that *it is a small thing with them to be judged of men; for he that judgeth them is the Lord^a*. And therefore, so long as God and their own conscience accuse them not, it is perfectly indifferent to them how they and their actions are thought of; nor can they think an innocent party concerned to give others the satisfaction of demonstrating that he is so. This is one of the false measures which even good persons are sometimes apt to take; and that it is a false one, I design this particular for a proof.

That our duty requires a very tender regard to the opinion of our brethren, and cannot be satisfied with the approving our sincerity to God alone, is evident from the express precepts, from the most engaging examples in holy Scripture, and indeed from common reason, and the nature of the thing. The Pharisees had no right to censure this miracle of Christ; nor was there any just matter of censure in

it; and yet he, who neither owned the authority nor the equity of any sentence they should pass, thought it convenient to clear an action, in itself good, from the very jealousies and mistaken imputations of evil. The method proposed by St. Peter for quieting slanderers and detractors, is not by setting at naught their ignorance and falsehood, but by being ready to justify our own conduct and principles, and putting them to silence by well doing*. What infinite pains do we find taken by St. Paul to set all right, and to be well with his Corinthians! And yet this is the very St. Paul who, at other times, disdains all false and diminishing reflections, objects to the jurisdiction of this lower court, and declares he is to stand or fall by his own Master in heaven. So careful were these eminent patterns to provide, as one of them expresses it, *things honest, not only in the sight of the Lord, but also in the sight of men*†; and to preserve a conscience void of offence towards both‡. Which exceeding wariness lest we should imagine a virtue necessary for such public characters only, that noble and excellent rule to the Philippians hath expressed this duty in terms of universal extent: *Finally, my brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things*. The motives here propounded are plainly of two kinds. The truth, the justice, the purity, these have respect to the real intrinsic worth, or, as he styles it in the end of the verse, *the virtue* of the action; then follow the honesty, the loveliness, the good report, all of them comprehended in *the praise* of the action. But sure, if each inducement did not bind us, it had been most absurd so solemnly to join them, and to have made the one a rule and principle of doing well no less than the other.

Hence I take it to be very evident that many things oblige us, on the account of the credit and commendation belonging to them, though not positively prescribed to by the written laws of God or man. And that all such pretences are frivolous and weak as would countenance and support licentiousness, by pleading that such liberties or indulgences are nowhere forbidden, and never therefore to be proved directly sinful. For if they hear ill in the world, and naturally expose a man to censure and disrepute, there needs no farther deliberation in the case: and although no vice, yet, supposing dispraise to be in them, the necessary consequence of St. Paul's exhortation is, *Think not on those things*.

Again: If an action be desirable because it is virtuous only or lovely only, we are certainly to employ our best endeavours for rendering it both. So to be *pure* and *just*, as likewise to be of *good report*. Not to defraud virtue of the commendation due to it, by humoursome pride or imprudence, but to be extremely solicitous for its good acceptance. And if it happen to be mistaken through ignorance, or misconstrued through envy, to labour hard in its justification. For all obloquy is certainly an unhappiness, not only to the

* 1 Pet. iii. 15, 16.

† 2 Cor. viii. 21.

‡ Acts xxiv. 16.

§ Phil. iv. 8.

good man, but also to goodness itself. And therefore it is a kindness, it is indeed a justice to both, that things *good* in themselves may not lose the advantage of coming abroad with a *good report*.

There is indeed a time when we are allowed to retreat within our own breasts, and ought to take sanctuary there. If men would discourage and affright us from our duty, what the word and providence of God plainly require at our hands, we are not to be terrified by their malice, or value their reflections one whit. But this always supposes the duty to be plain, and the utmost that may be done for preventing such displeasure and misinterpretation. If all that can be done prove ineffectual to these purposes, we then must, and may very well be satisfied with the approbation of Almighty God, and the testimony of a good conscience. But still, where God and man both can be satisfied; if we do not satisfy both, so much as we neglect in order to it, so much we abate of the censor's guilt and of our own comfort. The world is envious and ill-natured at the best, full of tongues and thoughts never to be restrained from the exercise of a freedom that by no means becomes them. The clearest virtue is scarce a sufficient defence: and after all our guard and circumspection, we shall find occasion more than enough for the last refuge of a good conscience; and people in abundance disposed to detraction and censure, who, even for the most innocent of our actions, will neither be persuaded by all we can do, nor convinced by all we can say. But to God and their own consciences be that, not to any fault or neglect of ours.

Yet here again I would be understood of such justification as is prudent and proper. For even our Saviour himself did sometimes reject evils and calumnies with indignation, and would not afford them the satisfaction of an argument. And there is really an inconvenience in the other extreme; an excessive officious solicitude, which does rather increase than remove the suspicion of guilt. For as some occasions are of importance to require our defence; so there is a malice to that degree froward and frivolous and impertinent, that the best way of setting ourselves at ease is to let it spend itself, and the most effectual answer to its scandals is by silence and scorn.

Meanwhile, when argument is seasonable, we shall do well to imitate our blessed Master's prudence in the choice of it. He might have discoursed very nicely upon the nature, the institution, the end of the sabbath; that a rest meant for the refreshment and benefit of mankind could not possibly oblige to an absolute cessation from works of necessity and charity, because this would tend directly to the prejudice and destruction of mankind. But he rather chooses to turn their own practice upon them. And this in truth is the method of treating violent and self-conceited men: to accommodate our discourse to their passions and interests, to shew the unreasonable creatures to themselves. For such are immoderately fond of their own doings, and will be tender in condemning the measures of their brethren, when made sensible that there is no remedy, but they must at the same time, and in the same or a greater degree, condemn those taken by themselves. Such an instance either wins them over to our favour, or at least it stops their mouths, and puts them more effectually

ally out of countenance than all the dry reasoning in the world. For in this effect and success also our Saviour is our precedent; this so sensible application to the Pharisees' own example, equalling, and, as is usual with men of that temper, even outdoing the very thing they so severely blamed in him, touched them so close, and so utterly confounded them, that the sixth verse acquaints us, *they could not answer him again to these things.*

The God of all grace so *prevent* and *follow* us with the seasonable assistances of his Holy Spirit, that in these wicked and dangerous days, all our thoughts, words, and works may be seasoned and conducted with such wariness and prudence, such firmness and zeal, such temper and condescension, as may derive honour upon his holy religion, promote the salvation of our own souls, and answer the character of his disciples and followers, who is made to us *wisdom*, as well as *sanctification and redemption*, *Jesus Christ the righteous* *. To whom, with the Father and Holy Spirit, be glory and praise and adoration henceforth and for evermore. Amen.

THE EIGHTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY.

THE COLLECT.

LORD, we beseech thee, grant thy people grace to withstand the temptations of the world, the flesh, and the devil, and with pure hearts and minds to follow thee the only God, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

THE EPISTLE. 1 Cor. i. 4.

4 *I thank my God always on your behalf, for the grace of God which is given you by Jesus Christ;*

5 *That in every thing ye are enriched by him, * in all utterance, and in all knowledge;*

6 *Even as the testimony of Christ was confirmed in you:*

7 *So that ye come behind in no gift; waiting for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ:*

8 *Who shall also confirm you unto the end, that ye may be blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ.*

more, that so ye may be of the number of them that are absolved by him in the great day of account.

5. * In a happy facility of instructing others, and in the understanding abstruse

mysterious doctrines or ancient prophecies.

6. The so clear evidence of which spiritual and divine powers is a confirmation of the doctrine of the gospel.

8. He will not be wanting to multiply his graces, and strengthen you yet

of them that are absolved by

COMMENT.

The service which this portion of Scripture may do us seems chiefly to consist in these following particulars :

1. To instruct us by St. Paul's example that it becomes all Christians in general, but more especially the ministers of the gospel, to be highly pleased with and truly thankful for the spiritual advantages which the bounty of God bestows upon any of our brethren. For none of these ought to be reckoned of private importance. They are given for use, and that use converts them to the benefit of the public^a. They illustrate the glory of the Almighty Giver, and advance the kingdom of Christ among men. And he cannot be a good subject who does not take satisfaction in every happy accession to his Lord's dominion and power, by what hand soever that enlargement come. Especially when it is considered how closely Christians are united in one mystical body, of which our Lord is the common head, and every fellow-disciple a member in particular ; this mutual relation renders it impossible for the benefits vouchsafed to any one part wholly to rest and determine there. Not to feel them is an argument that the animating Spirit hath withdrawn his influences from the insensible part ; not to be delighted with them is monstrous and unnatural ; for so the apostle argues in the twelfth of this Epistle, concerning the sympathy that is in our outward, as an intimation what ought to be in the inward man : *Whether one member suffer, all the members suffer with it ; or one member be honoured, all the members rejoice with it. Now ye are the body of Christ, and members in particular^b.*

2. The wisdom and address of St. Paul is very remarkable in choosing to begin his Epistle after this manner. The church of Corinth valued the extraordinary gifts of the Spirit among them, even to a degree of vanity. Nothing could therefore be more acceptable than a due commendation of these gifts, and a congratulation for the bounty of God, nowhere in this respect more eminent than in that church. But the mutual envyings and emulations occasioned by those gifts was one of the crying abuses intended to be rectified by this Epistle, and such as would require St. Paul to deal very plainly with them afterwards. And therefore, to make those rebukes go down the better, at present he forbears any other reproof than what his own example of doing the quite contrary included. The concern and thanks he solemnly expresses for the distinguishing graces of the Spirit so liberally imparted to others, shewing, by what they saw him do, what it was that each of them ought to do. And sure we never take a more becoming, more inoffensive, more promising course for reforming the errors and follies of our people, than by thus obliquely reprehending their bad by our own wiser and better example.

3. We learn from hence that these gifts are the effect of belief in Jesus Christ, that whether the ordinary or the extraordinary graces of the Spirit be our wealth, it is still to Christ that our being enriched ought entirely to be ascribed : so again,

^a See Epistle for the tenth Sunday after Trinity.

^b 1 Cor. xii. 27, 28.

4. That the gifts here spoken of are very fit testimonies for confirming the truth of the gospel : and,

5. That to those who have received them they are a warning to expect and prepare for the return of this King, who will certainly account with his servants for the talents left with them to be improved in his absence.

These are points which might be seasonably enough discoursed on here, had they not been sufficiently handled before^c.

6. The conclusion of this scripture sets us a precedent for a most comfortable inference to be drawn from the past liberality of God to us ; who begins with grace that he may end with glory. But then this must be so understood as to imply all those conditions which the new covenant hath interposed to qualify us for additions of spiritual strength here, and for a reward upon the improvement of it hereafter. We may safely promise ourselves that God will not be wanting on his part : but we have no warrant to presume upon being either *confirmed* here, or *found blameless* at the day of Christ, if there be no care taken not to be wanting on our part. Something is expected from every one ; more from each as each hath received more abilities. And the consequence of our neglect to employ these to the profit of the public and the honour of our Master is not to be *confirmed*, but deserted and confounded. The talent, instead of being doubled, shall be taken quite away, and the slothful unprofitable servant cast into outer darkness^d. All this is much more just in God than any parable can possibly represent ; because not only our talents but our power to employ them rightly are his gift. And both are like seed sown in the ground, which only, provided we take good heed to cultivate it diligently, will bless us with a large increase. And when this care is taken, though the best we do or can do will be allayed with infirmities and sins, yet we shall be *blameless*, i. e. such as (according to the allowances of the gospel) no reproach or fault shall be charged upon, *in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ*.

THE EIGHTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY.

THE GOSPEL. St. Matt. xxii. 34.

34 *When the Pharisees had heard that Jesus had put the Sadducees to silence, they were gathered together.*

35 *Then one of them, which was a *lawyer, asked him a question, tempting him, and saying,*

36 *Master, which is the great commandment in the law ?*

37 *Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and*

35. * A doctor of law.

37. Thou shalt love God above all things and all be-

^c Epistle for Monday in Whitsun-week and twelfth Sunday after Trinity ; also the Epistle and Gosp. for ninth Sunday, and the Epistle for tenth Sunday after Trinity. ^d Matt. xxv.

with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. sides in subordination to him. (See Comment on Gospel for fifteenth Sunday.)

38 This is the first and great commandment.

39 And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.

39. (See Comment on Gospel for thirteenth Sunday.)

40 On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.

41 While the Pharisees were gathered together, Jesus asked them,

42 Saying, What think ye of Christ? whose son is he? They say unto him, The son of David.

43 He saith unto them, How then doth David in spirit call him Lord, saying, greatly his superior? (This sure is not agreeable to the common manner of fathers mentioning their sons) and yet this he does in that Psalm prophetic of the Messiah. (Ps. cx.)

44 The Lord said unto my Lord, Sit thou on my right hand, till I make thine enemies thy footstool?

45 If David then call him Lord, how is he his son?

46 And no man was able to answer him a word, neither durst any man from that day forth ask him any more questions. 46. This inquiry did not only puzzle them at that time, but put an end to all their troubling him with any more cavilling and ensnaring questions.

COMMENT.

My design at present is to treat of the excellence of charity, or the love of God and our neighbour, by fixing upon that character given here of those two by our Saviour, when saying that the former is the *first and great commandment*, and the latter the *second, and like unto it*.

By *first* and *second* here no doubt is meant that these commands are so in dignity and importance, and merit the *first* and *second* place in our observance and esteem. And by the *greatness* of the commandment, I understand not its extent and comprehension only, but its excellence and perfection; of which that extent is but one out of many instances. The subject then to be enlarged upon is this; that the love of God and of our neighbour are duties which of all others we are most highly concerned to discharge. Yet still in such a manner that to the love of God an absolute preference is due, and no command whatsoever may stand in competition with that. But then the love of our neighbour succeeds next; which is so very near of kin to the former, so far superior to all engagements besides, as in order and consequence to give place to the love of God only.

Now the perfection of any moral law seems to be relative, and prin-

cially to consist in the qualities of the virtue it enjoins. Those commands therefore which enjoin the most noble, the most reasonable, the most useful virtues, and such as most conduce to the happiness of mankind, are justly esteemed above others; because, as I said, the subject matter of the law seems to be the measure of the goodness of the law. In proof then of the character given by our Saviour here, I am obliged to shew, first, that the love of God excels all other virtues in the several respects just now mentioned: and then, secondly, that the love of our neighbour, though it do not equal, does yet very much resemble, and come nearer up to it than any other.

1. First then, concerning that command which enjoins the love of God. The preeminence of this, above all others, is seen by its enjoining a virtue.

First, the most noble in itself; and that it does, whether we regard the matter or the object of it.

The matter of the command is love. An affection born in and bred up with us; so agreeable to nature, that it seems to be the reigning quality of the soul, the root and source of every other passion, and the common spring and principle of all our actions whatsoever. For we should hate nothing, we should envy nobody, should be guilty of no emulation, no supplanting, no injury to any other, were not this done in tenderness to ourselves, and from an apprehension that those persons do some way obstruct our happiness or disturb our ease. So that even our bitterest animosities and most violent aversions, when strictly considered, and traced back to their first original, are at last all resolved into this principle of love. To forbid this to any thing is in effect to forbid it to be. Something we always do, we always must love: and the business of reason and religion is not to quench this fire within our breasts, but to provide it with convenient fuel: not to root out the kindly passion, which would unravel and destroy nature; but to direct it to proper and worthy objects, which will exalt and perfect nature.

And herein no command can be comparable to this before us; which does not only prescribe an act the most natural, the most necessary, the most noble in itself, but places that act upon the best object also. For such without all controversy is God. The foundation and inducement to all love is good; either good in reality, or at least good in appearance. And the fault we are commonly guilty of in this matter is either mistaking evil for good, and loving that which ought to be hated and despised; or mistaking the degree of real goodness, and where it actually is in some measure, coveting and being pleased with it more than it deserves. But both these failures are effectually prevented when God is the object that determines our affection. He (as the apostle expresses it) *is light, and in him is no darkness at all*. Goodness is his nature and essence, goodness without blemish, defect, or alloy. To let loose our hearts upon any of the things of this world is sometimes sinful, and is always dangerous, because we fancy a great deal more to be in them than in truth there is. Reason might, and if that do not, sad experience will at last convince us that they are

not, cannot be, worthy our affection. But when we fix upon God, nothing there is sordid, nothing transient, hazardous, or deceitful. Here we may indulge our passion, and give it free scope; for as all exceeds our utmost range of thought, so all deserves our highest admiration; and we can fall under no other defect, but not admiring and not loving enough. In a word, this divine fire refines the soul, purges away the dross of lust and sense, raises it from earth to heaven, and conforms us to the image of the God we love. A God who could not condescend to be resembled by any other of the human passions, but who (St. John assures us) *is love itself*.

2. Secondly, This is deservedly esteemed the *first* and *great* commandment, as it enjoins a duty the most reasonable of any other. For such indeed is the love of God with regard to those adorable excellencies which I did but lightly touch upon in the former particular. And I could touch upon them but lightly; for no human mind can conceive, no art or eloquence can express them worthily and fully. But here I mean something more; and desire God may be looked upon, not only as infinitely good in himself, but as infinitely kind and good to us. For he is the general benefactor of the whole world; the Author and Giver of all we have in possession, the sum and ultimate end of all we can hope for. The fulness of joy dwells in his presence, and those inexhaustible rivers of pleasure, which all of us pretend to thirst and pant after, are nowhere to be found but at his right hand. We are therefore obliged to love him, not only in point of gratitude for what is past, but no less in point of interest for what we wish and expect in time to come. The heathens themselves, who had very low and dark notions of this matter in comparison of those which revelation hath given to us, could yet go so high by the light of mere nature as to agree that God is the chief and last good, and that the utmost happiness human nature is capable of must needs consist in being like him and being with him. And in this persuasion principally it is that the reasonableness of the commandment manifests itself. Because the motive of love, the apprehension of good, tends always to an object apprehended good to us. A thing supposed good in itself only would act upon our souls but very feebly. It may excite our admiration and command our praise; but commendation and wonder are too cold and speculative to deserve the name of love. We feel in daily conversation a plain difference between our regards to persons from whom we expect or have received advantage and delight, and those paid to persons distant and unknown, whose virtues only recommend them to us. We can allow the latter more respect, and acknowledge their character superior to that of our dearest relations or best friends, without suffering such approbation to grow into affection. For when all is done, tenderness will not follow upon intrinsic value only; but a distinction must be made between friendship and respect; and interest shall always cast the scale against a multitude of good qualities, if they be such as ourselves reap no sensible and immediate benefit from.

But now, in Almighty God, both these attractives conspire to fix

our hearts; the most exquisite perfection, and the largest bounty: the one to raise our esteem, the other to inflame our affection. And in truth it is great pity these things are not better understood. For one main reason why the generality of people are so deficient in this duty seems to proceed upon a false notion, which puts a difference between the love of God and the love of themselves. Whereas these two can never be separated in nature; for we do then most effectually love ourselves when we love God most fervently. And if this persuasion were once well established in our minds, the virtue I am treating of could scarce deserve to be called a moral duty, in which we are supposed to act with freedom of will; but would even advance into a natural principle, where we are determined beforehand, and have not the power of refusing. All that choice hath to do in this matter is to say whether we will consider or not: but if that be once done fairly, the reason of the thing is too evident and too cogent to be withstood. For no man yet ever did, ever could hate himself; and consequently no man ever hated that which he esteemed his good, or preferred any other thing before that which he esteemed his chief good. So that, supposing men to be convinced that God is their good, they cannot love themselves and not love him; and supposing them convinced that he is their supreme good, they cannot but acquiesce in the reasonableness of this command, and must love him, as every one to be sure does love himself, *with all the heart, and with all the soul, and with all the mind* &c.

3. This command excels all others, thirdly, in point of usefulness. For whereas the rest are generally determined to some single virtue, the love of God enjoined here is of vast comprehension and universal influence; it facilitates the practice of good works of every kind; and it recommends the performance or the endeavours with regard to each of them.

1. It comprehends good works of every kind, by reason of that earnest desire to please which is an inseparable property of love. *If ye love me, keep my commandments*^b, is no less a dictate of nature than of religion. Such as shews this to be an active virtue, not to be expressed by the ecstasies of our minds so much as by the tenor of our lives and conversations. Not but that it disposes us powerfully to both; for this will quicken our zeal, give us a sensible delight in conversing with God, will wing our souls with devotion, both in public and private, and make us fly to his arms with joy unspeakable, in raptures of prayer and praises, and pious meditations. This will help us to discover the beauties of his glory and majesty, and kindle a noble ambition of the utmost likeness to him, so far as the frailties of a mortal nature can admit by being *holy as* and because *he is holy*^c. This will allow no advantage to come into comparison with his favour, nor any misery with his displeasure. It will not decline the most mortifying severities, when used as expedients to secure his good graces; but will disdain the world and all its treacherous allurements, which would defraud us of our only, our eternal bliss, and make us look deformed in the eyes of him whom our soul loveth. So just

^a Matt. xxii. 37.

^b John xiv. 15.

^c 1 Pet. i. 15, 16.

reason had St. Paul to say that *the end of the commandment is charity*^k; for this, like a fruitful tree, expands itself into all graces, is like one common trunk to so many branches; and were it once hath thoroughly taken root, there will not fail to be *a pure heart, and a good conscience, and faith unfeigned*.

2. Again, as this virtue comprehends the rest, so does it render the practice of them all easy and pleasant to us. It conquers the reluctances of corrupt nature, invigorates the sluggish mass, and, like the soul in the body or the spirits in the blood, puts life and activity into all our motions. It softens our difficulties, and reconciles us to those precepts which would otherwise be insupportable. Fear may prevail for some outward acts of obedience, but all without love is slavery and constraint; for the mind is not properly in them till necessity be turned into choice. Then indeed every engagement is bound fast upon our souls; it will be *our meat and drink to do the will of our heavenly Father*^l. And we shall confess from the very heart what our prayers daily put into our mouths, that his *service is freedom, perfect freedom*. It was this that filled the apostles with joy, *that they were counted worthy to suffer for the name of Jesus*^m. This that rendered the labours of St. Paul so indefatigable, and his resolution so undaunted, that even *life was no longer dear to him, but he was ready not only to be bound, but also to die at Jerusalem for his Master's sake*ⁿ. And indeed love seems to be the only principle that can secure our steadfastness, and look danger and death in the face. Nor could that *noble army of martyrs* ever have fought their good fight, and triumphed over racks and crosses and fires for religion, had not a coal from heaven first touched their breasts, and kindled them into this divine flame.

3. Once more. As love quickens the heavy and sweetens the harsh and unpalatable parts, so does it likewise recommend the good we do, or attempt to do, above any other consideration whatsoever. It is a principle common to laws divine as well as human to measure the deserts of men, not so much by the outward act as by the intent and disposition of the mind. Hence offences against the letter of the law, if not committed with a purpose to offend, have an equitable relief allowed them. Hence also the most specious acts of virtue, if done by chance, or with indirect purposes, are of small value in God's sight. St. Paul supposes it a possible case for a man to *give even his body to be burned*, and to *distribute all his goods to feed the poor*, and yet at the same time *not to have charity*^o. And if it be thus with him, that man and all his pompous appearances of piety are declared to be *nothing*, it is this alone can keep our designs from being mercenary and mean; for though our duty and our interest are but one and the same thing considered under different views, yet are we oftentimes to blame in preferring the worse part of ourselves, in opposition to God, and in prejudice to our better part. He who made us knows by what variety of springs mankind are set in motion, and hath therefore made fear also and temporal evils and advantages inducements to our duty; but none is so suitable to the dignity of our nature and the reasonableness

^k 1 Tim. i. 5. ^l John iv. 34. ^m Acts v. 41. ⁿ Acts xxi. 13. ^o 1 Cor. xiii. 3.

of religion, as the desire and love of God. Which accordingly we find styled by the prophet God's *drawing us to himself with the cords of a man*^p.

But, which is more, our attempts to do well are recommended, and even our transgressions are graciously passed over, in virtue of this love. And can there be a more comfortable reflection, than that a creature impotent and frail should be accepted, not strictly according to what he knows and does, but as he would know and would do; that gracious allowances should be made for a multitude of surprises and infirmities, for unaffected ignorance, and an honest mistaken zeal? The plain reason whereof is, that the love of God preserves us from perverse and malicious wickedness; it secures our integrity, and supposes us to do our best. The power and opportunities of doing better are not always in our own disposal, and where we fall short through want of these, our good intentions will be placed to account. But the heart and will to do well we are properly answerable for; and love, which sets this right, does therefore make amends for many imperfections; and presents us at the throne of grace, though in ourselves very feeble, very impure, yet in the sight of a merciful Judge, righteous and clean and good.

4. The fourth preeminence of this commandment consists in imposing a virtue which of all others most conduces to the happiness of mankind. For so does the love of God in many respects. It gives us undoubted assurance of his favour in return, whose *lovingkindness is better than life itself*^q. It procures us a truce from the evils of the world, and takes out the sting of all we feel or fear, by reposing the soul upon a gracious and wise Providence, which we are sure does *not only care for us, but order all events so that they shall work together for our good*^r. It frees us from terror and disquiet, brings under the violence of our appetites, endures none of those rival passions to get head, to the restless importunity whereof the greatest uneasinesses of life are truly owing. It weans our affections from the present world, by carrying up the thoughts to nobler and more durable objects. And when those objects are attained, this single virtue hath the privilege of bearing us company in a future state. For it is the apostle's observation, that although *faith, hope, and charity abide now*^s, that is, are all three accommodated to our present condition, yet *the greatest of these is charity*. And therefore *the greatest*, because it is the work of heaven and immortality; the constant entertainment and bliss of *angels and spirits of just men made perfect*^t. For they *see God as he is*^u; and the more they see of him, the more they must needs love him. And in regard no finite being can ever comprehend his infinite perfections, and see him fully; therefore the matter which excites this love must needs be inexhaustible, and the exercise of it must needs be everlasting.

These arguments, I conceive, will abundantly justify the character given here of the love of God, and prove that to be the *first and great commandment*. It remains now to shew how the love of our neighbour

^p Hosea xi. 4.

^q Psalm lxxiii.

^r Rom. viii. 28.

^s 1 Cor. xiii. 13.

^t Heb. xii. 23.

^u 1 John iii. 2.

is in these several respects the *second*, and *like unto it*. Which I shall content myself with doing in very few words, and so conclude.

1. This commandment is *like unto* the former, as engaging us to the same natural, the same generous act of love, and as it determines that love to an object the most worthy of any that we can hold sensible conversation with in this state of mortality. But then it is also second or inferior to the former in both these regards; because it limits the love of our neighbour to such kinds and degrees only as are consistent with our duty to and love of God. It preserves a just difference between the image and the original: between an affection and esteem proportioned to a creature equal by nature with ourselves; and that absolute reverence and unbounded desire with which our hearts ought to be enlarged toward the great Creator; a Being of incomprehensible perfection, and infinitely superior both to our neighbour and ourselves.

2. Again; this second resembles the *first and great* commandment in its reasonableness. For we are to look upon mankind not only as the fairest copy of the Divinity here below, but also as good and beneficial to one another. For this, among other wise reasons, Providence hath left every man in an indigent and depending state; and ordained that no man, of how exalted a condition soever, should have ease and happiness, or even the most necessary supplies of life, perfectly in his own power. Thus our necessities become unavoidable engagements to a perpetual commerce and friendly intercourse; and our mutual succours are so many mutual endearments. For nature will always value that which is useful to it: and interest, no less than gratitude, inspires a tenderness for them without whose assistance we cannot be supported. The reason then of this duty is very obvious, by coming home to our own profit at last; for indeed thus to love and do good to our neighbour is in effect to love and serve ourselves.

But still this can be but the second commandment. For though we are obliged to *love our neighbour as ourselves*, because he is compounded of the same matter and form, a branch of the same root, a stream of the same source; the same human nature, the same image of the Divine mind exemplified and imparted to us all in common; yet the fountain must needs continue more honourable from whence these several currents issue forth. And though the benefits men receive from each other are so much more sensible, immediate, and affecting, that St. John declares him a *liar who hates his brother whom he hath seen*, and boasts of *loving God whom he hath not seen*^x; yet we are always to remember, that men *could have no power* to our advantage, *except it were given them from above*. Their very inclination to do us good is from an impulse of divine grace; their ability and opportunities of doing it are from the bounty of divine Providence. The wisdom, the authority, the riches, the friendships they do it with, are so many talents committed to their management for this very purpose. So that our first and greatest thanks and love must needs be owing to the author and original proprietor of these advantages: and after him, to those whom he appoints his stewards. For such indeed

are the best and highest of the sons of men, the dispensers of God's liberality, and in their several stations instruments [for handing it down to us.

3. So likewise, thirdly, for its usefulness: this is a most comprehensive duty. *All the law, says the apostle, is fulfilled in one word, even this, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself*¹. And so it manifestly is. For this gives us that compendious rule of making every other man's case our own. Which cuts off all those wicked partialities, and that selfish narrowness of spirit, from whence all injustice and uncharitableness proceed. This takes off all that worldly minds think burdensome; displays the charms of liberality and good-nature; disposes us to distribute with simplicity, to *shew mercy with cheerfulness*²; and proves experimentally the truth of our Lord's maxim, *It is more blessed to give than to receive*³. In short, it engages every man's affection and assistance for every other man; and where actions can avail nothing, secures the benefit of prayers and good wishes. It commands all possible and proper testimonies of an hearty readiness to serve one another; and ensures acceptance for the meanest of those services, by rendering the will of equal merit with the deed.

Lastly, This second commandment is of great affinity, but still in subordination to the first, as it conduces to the general happiness of mankind. For this it does most evidently, most effectually, by subduing our pride, our avarice, our ambition, our envyings and emulations, our every unruly lust and appetite, from whence divisions in the church, factions in the state, animosities and parties, wars and fightings, miseries and confusions grow. It is the strongest cement of society, the best preserver of justice and equity, obedience and order, peace and unity. Without it the most prudent laws signify but little; and with it they are in a manner needless; for laws are in the nature of bridles, to curb and rein them in, who for want of this love are continually biting and devouring one another. This would set us at one with our bitterest enemies, or rather indeed it would leave no such thing as an enemy in the world. And (to justify its resemblance yet more to the *first and great commandment*) this also continues and is perfected among the blessed hereafter. For though the essence of their bliss consist in a perpetual contemplation of the glory and goodness of God, yet large additions will be ever flowing into it by the joy that redounds from the happiness of our brethren, who shall be made partakers of the same precious promises with ourselves.

O that most glorious and happy day, when faith shall give place to sight, and hope be swallowed up in present and complete enjoyment! when all imperfections shall cease, all differences be composed, and nothing remain but strict unanimity, and boundless love, and exquisite delight! when a new scene shall open of an eternity to be employed in consorts of praise and thanks for the excellent glory of God, and his inestimable goodness to us and to all mankind! But till that blest day come, if there be any sense of interest or of duty, if any regard to the happiness of the public, to the honour of religion, to the salvation of our own souls; in a word, if any care to approve

¹ Galat. v. 14.

² Rom. xii. 8.

³ 1. Acts xx. 35.

ourselves Christians in good earnest, let it be seen by abounding in that love to God and our neighbour which is *the very bond of peace and of all virtues*. Let it be seen by addressing ourselves most devoutly to the throne of grace, with those petitions which the best of churches puts into our mouths: beseeching *Almighty God to cleanse the thoughts of our hearts by the inspiration of his Holy Spirit, that we may perfectly love him^b*; and to *pour down* into them *that most excellent gift of charity, without which whosoever liveth is counted dead before him*. And may he grant this for his only Son Jesus Christ his sake^c. Amen.

THE NINETEENTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY.

THE COLLECT.

O God, forasmuch as without thee we are not able to please thee; Mercifully grant, that thy Holy Spirit may in all things direct and rule our hearts; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.^d

THE EPISTLE. Eph. iv. 17.

17 *This I say therefore, and testify in the Lord, that ye henceforth walk not as other Gentiles walk, in the vanity of their mind,* 17. This intimate union with Christ (ver. 16) I affirm to be an indispensable obligation upon you for living under such advantages and helps, after quite another manner than unconverted Gentiles do ignorantly suppose themselves at liberty to do.

18 *Having the understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart :* 18, 19. For they, by the blindness of their judgment, and that aversion they have to a life of reason and purity, which should recommend and resemble them to God, have lost all sense of the absurdity and vileness of the grossest sins: and so have not only prostituted themselves to the practice, but by custom hardened themselves into a liking of and delight in and eagerness after the most filthy carnalities.

19 *Who being past feeling have given themselves over unto lasciviousness, to work all uncleanness with greediness.*

20 *But ye have not so learned Christ ;* 21 *If so be that ye have heard him, and have been taught by him, as the truth is in Jesus :*

22 *That ye put off concerning the former conversation the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts ;* 22, 23, 24. See Epistle for sixth, twelfth, and eighteenth Sundays.

^b First Collect for the Communion Service.

^c Collect for Quinquagesima Sunday.

^d Rom. viii. 8; Eph. iv. 8—14.

23 *And be renewed in the spirit of your mind;*

24 *And that ye put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness.*

25 *Wherefore putting away lying, speak every man truth with his neighbour: for we are members one of another.*

26 *Be ye angry, and sin not: let not the sun go down upon your wrath:*

27 *Neither give place to the devil.*

28 *Let him that stole steal no more: but rather let him labour, working with his hands the thing which is good, that he may have to give to him that needeth.*

ing men in, that it requires bodily labour from them who cannot subsist honestly without it, and expects even from them who get their living this way some proportion of alms for the sustenance of the poor. See Epistle on second Sunday after Epiphany.

29 *Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace unto the hearers.*

30 *And grieve not the holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption.*

Spirit of God, and provoke him to withdraw those sanctifying graces from you, which are given as an earnest of your salvation at the last day, and a testimony of God's admitting you into all the privileges of the gospel covenant, and owning you as his peculiar. (See Epistle for eighth and twelfth Sundays.)

31 *Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil speaking, be put away from you, with all malice:*

32 *And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you.*

25. One vice (or member as it were) of the old man to be put off, is lying; a pernicious to human society.

26, 27. Another is sinful anger; which will always be so if retained long; and will the devil and his temptations.

28. Another is theft and all manner of fraudulent dealing, which the Christian religion is so far from allow-

ing men in, that it requires bodily labour from them who cannot subsist honestly without it, and expects even from them who get their living this way some proportion of alms for the sustenance of the poor.

29. See Epistle on third Sunday in Lent.

30. Do not, by a conversation so opposite to his nature, displease the Holy

Spirit of God, and provoke him to withdraw those sanctifying graces from you, which are given as an earnest of your salvation at the last day, and a testimony of God's admitting you into all the privileges of the gospel covenant, and owning you as his peculiar. (See Epistle for eighth and twelfth Sundays.)

31. See Gospel for sixth Sunday.

32. See Gospel for twenty-second Sunday.

COMMENT.

THE absolute necessity, as well as the invaluable benefits of that Divine revelation and grace ministered by the gospel of Christ, need no other evidence than the description given here by St. Paul of those miserable circumstances to which the heathens were reduced for want of them^b. The wretched ignorance and errors whereby the candle of the Lord within them—the faculties of reason and judgment—were almost quite put out. The total depravation of the will and affections,

^b Ver. 17, 18, 19.

addicted and fastened down to objects of flesh and sense; and irreconcilably averse to all the ends and methods wherein the dignity of human nature and the excellence of a spiritual and divine life do consist. The utter insensibility and obduration of the heart and conscience which customary sinning introduces: partly by men's own obstinate indulgence of their wicked lusts, and resisting the checks and admonitions of their own and God's Spirit; and partly by that judicial hardness which God is provoked to inflict, by withdrawing those preventing and assisting graces which they have continued to abuse and despise. And lastly, the inability of corrupt nature to discern and apply itself to matters of religion: plainly demonstrated by the examples of eminent heathon philosophers, who, though exceeding shrewd and sagacious in other respects, were yet in this mistaken, and absurd even to the most despicable degree of childishness and folly. These are experiments too plain to be gainsaid, and such as conspire at once to give us a very mean opinion of our own natural powers, and to oblige us to thankfulness for those supernatural assistances to which we owe the very capacity either of *pleasing God* or of thinking and acting like men.

Concerning the change said afterwards to be wrought upon persons converted to Christianity^d, it may be seasonable to observe, that the manner of the apostle's expressing it intimates their becoming quite another sort of people, and the very reverse of what they had been before*. The *old man to be put off* is said to be *corrupt according to the deceitful lusts*. Those lusts which cheated men with flattering promises of satisfactions which they cannot yield; and therefore the change in this point will consist in stopping our ears against all false insinuations from that quarter, abandoning the unprofitable corruption, and having our *fruit unto holiness*. This implies mortifying and renouncing all sinful desires, repenting and effectually forsaking all our past faults: but *putting on the new man* implies a great deal more. This supposes activity and diligence in piety and virtue; doing good no less than abstaining from evil. And proves how sandy a foundation those hopes are built upon which look for salvation and acceptance with God for not being vicious only: and provided the sins of commission be carefully avoided, are as little concerned for those of omission as if they were to make no article in our account. The danger of which too common deceit we may reasonably suppose our blessed Lord had in view, and intended effectually to warn us all against, by so directly levelling at them his descriptions of the general judgment, under those two famous parables of the *talents* and the *sheep and the goats*^f.

Again. As the great depravity of an unregenerate state consists in an *alienation from the life of God*, so does the commendation of a regenerate one in being *created after God in righteousness and true holiness*^e. And this consideration duly borne in mind would, I cannot but think, abundantly suffice to satisfy those doubts and scruples men dispute so variously about, concerning some liberties, the lawfulness

^c Epistle for Epiphany.
^f Matt. xxv.

^d Ver. 22, 23, 24.

^e See Epistle for the fifth Sunday after Trinity.
^f Eph. iv. 24.

whereof is questionable; or the measure and circumstance of others, the lawfulness whereof in themselves is unquestionable. For, in such cases, would we but ask our consciences whether a total abstaining from the former, and a prudent and somewhat severer restraint with regard to the latter, or a larger and more unguarded allowance, in such cases, have more of the spirit of religion, more of a new heart and affections, more of conformity to the holiness of God, after whose image it is our glory to be created, and whose likeness it is our duty to preserve and express, and aspire after higher degrees of; the resolution of this single question would clearly inform us, though not what is strictly lawful or unlawful, yet (which is more useful) what is fit or unfit, agreeable or disagreeable to our character; better than all the subtilties of casuists, or entering into the niceties of any such particular points whatsoever.

From the mention of this great change from the old to the *new man*, St. Paul descends to some particulars permitted by the heathens by no means allowable to Christians^b. The first whereof is *lying*, which in some cases the philosophers made no scruple to excuse, nay, even to approve. But the apostle here urges the duty of speaking truth, as a duty resulting from our union into one mystical body. In which there ought to be no manner of fraud practised: as experience proves that never any is between the members of the natural body. The design of speech is to communicate our thoughts, and so to profit one another; not to disguise them, and so by deceiving to hurt one another. Against this design all manner of falsehood seems to make, and where that is attended with malice and mischievous intent, I should rather choose to call this a complicated crime than to say that untruth without it is no crime at all. It will not follow from hence, that a man shall be obliged to speak all truths that may do hurt; but neither will it follow, because some truths may be innocently and profitably concealed, that therefore we are at liberty to speak things that are untrue. For whatever particular convenience may persuade in some extraordinary cases, surely an obstinate silence is more becoming a Christian's sincerity and charity, than such impostures as tend to that general inconvenience of destroying the security and mutual confidence that ought always to be among men whose common interest always is the same. The examples produced out of Scripture in vindication of all those which are usually styled *officious lies*, cannot be of any considerable weight; because they are only related as historical facts, but nowhere recommended as a pattern for our imitation. And those lies which are termed *ironical*, and made a matter of jest or sport, seem to be diversion much beneath the character of a grave and good man. They may administer a little mirth to the person using them; but it is sufficient condemnation to this sort of entertainment, that those parties generally think themselves despised and ill-used who discover that they have been imposed upon by them.

The next of these particulars is *anger*^c. Which that it is, considered in itself, and upon all occasions whatsoever, unlawful, neither the most rigid philosophers nor the severest Christians have, I think,

^b Ver. 25.^c Ver. 26.

ever been able to prove. This is one of the passions implanted in us by nature. The first motions of it seem to be mechanical and necessary; the hastiness or slowness to it depends in great measure upon the temper of the body and the animal spirits. Thus far it is not subject to the power of our own will or to the corrections of reason and religion. This also is a passion (like all the rest of those styled *simple* and *natural* ones) capable of serving excellent purposes when managed with sobriety and discretion. For there is a tameness of spirit which deserves censure and reproof; and in some cases we even do well to be angry. For admitting anger, according to the received notion of it, to proceed upon a desire of obtaining satisfaction for some injury done, or conceived to be done, to us or to those we love; the honour of God, the reverence to the laws, the love of virtue, the protection of good men, may make this not only innocent but necessary and commendable. For instance, when the name of God, his word and truth, things which ought to be most sacred, are boldly violated and impiously trampled upon; no good Christian can, none in a public character may see this done without indignation, or is obliged to suffer the offenders to pass off unrebuked for their wickedness and folly. Thus Moses was exceedingly provoked, and his *anger waxed hot*^k, at the molten calf which the Israelites had made, to dishonour God and themselves in the wilderness. And our blessed Saviour, the perfect pattern of meekness and patience, is said not only to have been grieved, but to *look upon the Pharisees with anger, because of the hardness of their hearts*^l. And as these occasions, where the glory of God and the good of others are concerned, justify some resentments of this kind; so St. Paul, in the scripture now before us, seems to imply that they may be warrantable with regard to private injuries and affronts, provided always that due care be taken to restrain their excesses, and to conquer and compose them in time. It is therefore very observable how his caution runs, *Be ye angry, and sin not: let not the sun go down upon your wrath: neither give place to the devil*^m.

The manner of this exhortation does in the meanwhile plainly argue that, however upon some occasions and in some degrees anger may be lawful, yet the justest anger cannot be excused when it continues long. For though, as we observed just now, the first motions of our passion may not be under our check and jurisdiction; though we desire and grieve and resent, as naturally and unavoidably as we hunger or thirst; yet, when that first gust is over, the governing part of the soul may and ought to interpose its powers, and by a timely and prudent care quell the rebellious disturber of our peace. Lay the storm we may and must, though we could not prevent the blowing of the wind, nor the swelling of the waves when it did blow. No heathen masters of morality do ever mention the peevish without blame. But for the sullen and morose, who feed upon the bitter morsel and turn it into gall, no terms of reproach were ever thought too hard for them. Much less will Christianity endure the harbouring and cherishing of any evil thoughts. If these intrude we must immediately cast them

^k Exod. xxxii. 19.^l Mark iii. 5.^m Eph. iv. 26, 27.

out, compose our spirits, and return to a peaceful and kind disposition. Silent grudges and secret contrivances of revenge, and quarrels perpetuated or industriously prolonged, can never be consistent with the obedience of that Master who hath so solemnly enjoined all his servants to *forgive* and to *love* their enemies^a. No man can nourish a lasting anger without living in open defiance to the duty of charity. And since no other person's breach of his duty can bear me out in the breach of mine; and an excess may be committed (the worst excess indeed) in the duration as well as in the degree of a passion; it is certain that every one who continues in a state of enmity and wrath, commits a fault which the highest provocations can never justify; and exposes his salvation to infinite hazard and danger.

For we ought by all means to take notice of those very significant words, added as an enforcement of the apostle's exhortation, *Neither give place to the devil*^b. Not *letting the sun go down upon their wrath*^c, was a precept even of heathen philosophers^d: observed most strictly by the scholars of Pythagoras in particular, who, after any quarrel, constantly shook hands, and professed hearty reconciliation, at the setting of the sun. This therefore was an usage very proper to remind men of who had been converted from paganism, because referring to a duty which the wisest and best among themselves, even when not yet Christians, thought of indispensable obligation. But now the apostle adds a weightier enforcement, that of the ill consequences certain to attend the neglect of it. For the devil, as a tempter, works upon us by our passions; the excesses of these, in what kind soever, are the only handle he can lay hold on us by: and he, who is continually upon the watch for our destruction, will be sure to slip no advantage we give him. But a greater can in no case be given him than by the continuance of our anger. For as this is a most outrageous passion, deaf to all good advice, and disturbing the operations of reason, to keep this up is to get the man entirely into his own power. It is to make him the most like himself, who is a murderer and malicious liar in wait from the beginning^e: it is utterly to deface all the lines of God's image; to exclude all benefit from the sufferings of Christ; to destroy all the principles of religion, and their influence upon his mind; to ripen him for any manner of wickedness in this, and to fill up the measure of his damnation in the other world. So just is that maxim of the Jews, that all hell dwells and reigns in the angry and malicious man. Very near this here of *giving place* to, making room for, the *devil*; yielding, as it were, our souls up, and putting him into possession; than which, no Christian need be told, a greater sin and misery, and surer pledge of eternal condemnation, the state we now live in is not capable of.

The remaining parts of this day's Epistle have been formerly under consideration in the places referred to by the paraphrase.

^a Matt. v. 44.^b Eph. iv. 27.^c Ver. 26.^d Plutarch.^e See Epistle for the second Sunday after Trinity.

THE NINETEENTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY.

THE GOSPEL. St. Matt. ix. 1.

1 *Jesus entered into a ship, and passed over, and came into his own city.* 1. Jesus, leaving the country of the Gergasenes at the desire of the inhabitants, (after the loss of the swine, into whom he had permitted the devils to enter,) coasted over the lake of Genesareth and came to Capernaum; Mark ii. 1, 2.

2 *And, behold, they brought to him a man sick of the palsy, lying on a bed: and Jesus seeing their faith said unto the sick of the palsy; Son, be of good cheer; thy sins be forgiven thee.* 2. Upon the news of his arrival vast crowds of people came together. Among others, some who brought a miserable paralytic to be cured; but the multitudes of people not suffering them to come in by the door, they let him down through the roof of the house; Mark ii. 3, 4; Luke v. 18, 19.

3 *And, behold, certain of the scribes said within themselves, This man blasphemeth.* 3. The scribes charged him with blasphemy, for arrogating to himself a power of forgiving sins, which the Scripture declares to belong to God only; Mark ii. 7; Luke v. 21; vii. 49.

4 *And Jesus knowing their thoughts said, Wherefore think ye evil in your hearts?*

5 *For whether is easier, to say, Thy sins be forgiven thee; or to say, Arise, and walk?*

6 *But that ye may know that the Son of man hath power on earth to forgive sins, (then saith he to the sick of the palsy,) Arise, take up thy bed, and go unto thine house.*

7 *And he arose, and departed to his house.*

8 *But when the multitudes saw it, they marvelled, and glorified God, which had given such power unto men.* 8. This was such an instance of divine power, as they confessed did exceed all that ever they had seen before; Luke v. 26; Mark ii. 12; and therefore they gave God thanks for exerting it among them in so astonishing and beneficial a manner.

COMMENT.

I have, in the paraphrase, observed the manner of bringing this sick person to our Saviour, as we find it more largely described in the accounts of it left us by St. Mark and St. Luke. They tell us, that the confluence of people about our blessed Lord was so great, as not only to fill the house in which he then remained, but to leave no room, no possibility for approaching so much as the door. This difficulty

put the friends of the diseased upon a new and very unusual method of untilling the house, and letting down the sick man in his couch through the roof. Nothing could better express the vigour of their *faith*; that is, their eager desire of obtaining, and their confident expectation of receiving a cure from the power and goodness of Christ, of which they had entertained so full a persuasion. And therefore he, who never wanted inclination to pity and relieve the distressed, and only waited till men were duly qualified to receive the mercies which he was always ready to bestow, *seeing their faith*, that is, finding them capable, and judging this a fit opportunity for exercising his divine compassion, granted their request, and healed the distemper presently.

Some persons have from hence taken occasion to enter into very nice, and, I think, very needless disputes, how far a man may be profited by the faith and the intercessions of others in his behalf. Supposing (it seems) because the story makes no mention of any faith except that of the friends and bearers of this impotent man, that the patient himself had no part in that virtuous disposition, to which Jesus allowed so tender and gracious a regard. But St. Chrysostom may well be thought to have made a better judgment of the case; who supposes *their faith* not an exclusive term; and so to mean, not that of his friends only, but of the sick person also. He thinks the suffering himself to be presented to Christ in a method so troublesome to his weak condition, an argument of much zeal and great assurance in him. And though we read nothing of any petition made in his own person, yet will not this circumstance amount to a sufficient objection against him. The violence of his distemper may reasonably be presumed to have disabled his speech; or if it had not, yet the very spectacle of a body so debilitated, the manner of the action, the fatigue undergone in it, all spoke for him, and carried a more moving eloquence than it was possible for any tongue to utter. But, above all, the remission of his sins evidently proves the temper of his own mind. For however other people may prevail for temporal blessings upon the friends they ask for, yet religion hath given us no ground to believe that any man's actual offences can ever be absolved without the offender's own actual remorse and hearty desires of forgiveness.

Some again have gone into an opinion very distant from the former, and exalt this man's virtue to so high a degree of resignation as to determine his faith and that of his friends to quite different objects. His friends, they tell us, according to the weakness of minds more carnal, were concerned only for the recovery of his bodily health; but he, whose disposition was more spiritual and abstracted, was solicitous for nothing but the healing of his soul. And this being a mercy of infinitely higher consequence, our Lord first gratified his desires, and afterwards granted the request of his friends. By this example designing to instruct us what is the order proper to be observed in asking and in esteeming the blessings of God. That the spiritual should always have the preference above the temporal; and that the diseases and infirmities of our inward man are abundantly more

to be lamented and provided against than any pains or necessities of the outward.

These inferences are, without all question, just and true; but that ground here assigned for them seems to be altogether precarious and conjectural. And therefore I shall rather fix upon something for a foundation of them, which the relation made by the evangelist seems to have set in a very clear light. It is the method of our Lord's proceeding. He, though the visible and immediate design, and, in all likelihood, the sole end in view, of applying to him at this time, was the recovery of the palsy; yet overlooking, as it were, the disease, accosts the man in terms very foreign in appearance to the intent and expectation of those that were present. For first of all he says, *Son, be of good cheer; thy sins be forgiven thee*; and defers that which might be imagined more important and to the purpose, by not saying, till some time after, *Arise, and take up thy bed, and walk*.

Now the reasons for this manner of proceeding I take to be principally two: the one expressly declared, the other manifestly implied.

1. That which the evangelists take direct notice of is our Lord's hereby gaining an opportunity to make his divine authority known. For he who *perceived the thoughts of the scribes*, and what they said *within themselves* after he had spoken, could not be ignorant of the *evil in their hearts*, and the interpretation they would pass upon what he was about to speak. Since then their perverseness was such that *they would not fail to censure him for blasphemy*: as his goodness would not suffer this languishing creature to want the consolation of forgiveness for any offence the enemies of his doctrine might take at it; so his wisdom converted their malice into an occasion of more plentiful conviction, by so ordering two instances of his divine power, that they should mutually illustrate and establish each other.

The captious Pharisees, upon his releasing the sick man from inward guilt, immediately charge our Lord with blasphemy; i. e. an impious dishonour done to God by sacrilegiously usurping a right peculiar to God alone. The principle which this accusation went upon our Lord plainly allows: but then he clears himself of it by this consequence, that as no power but God's could forgive sins, so none but God's could work this miracle of healing. If therefore he should give *them* a sensible demonstration of his divinity in one of the instances, they ought to be satisfied that he had done no more than became him in the other. Consequently that he who healed this person's body (not by a ministerial and delegated power, not by invoking the assistance of God, as the prophets used to do, but by an inherent authority of his own, which could command all created nature) was that very Lord of soul and body both, who, they acknowledged, had alone right to acquit the consciences of men*. This is the evident design and meaning of our blessed Saviour's reply at the fifth and sixth verses; *Whether is easier to say, (that is, to say with efficacy and success,) Thy sins be forgiven thee; or to say, Arise, and walk? But that ye may know that the Son of man hath power on earth to forgive sins,*

(then saith he to the sick of the palsy,) *Arise, take up thy bed, and go unto thine house.*

Now in this managery we may discern a wonderful prudence for the putting that truth out of all dispute which our blessed Saviour intended to establish. The remission of sins is a spiritual and invisible blessing. In this his enemies might suspect that he arrogated to himself more than he was able to make good; and boasted with great security, in a case where nobody could disprove him. But the cure of the disease their own eyes would judge of: and this had its difficulties no less than the other; that is, both were impossible except with God only. The efficacy of his word therefore, demonstrated in one of these beyond all contradiction or doubt, ought in reason to produce the belief of a power no less than almighty in the other, though the same ocular demonstration were not given of it. Because the want of like demonstration in both cases was not from any defect in the person operating, as if his power did not extend to both alike; but to the different nature of the cases themselves, which could not both admit of it alike. For one was the object of sense, and proved itself; but there was an unavoidable necessity that the other should be the collection of reason. And therefore it was proper to make evidence of this by the former, which carried its own evidence along with it.

2. The other reason, which I said our Lord's manner of proceeding implied, is, that this man's infirmity was inflicted upon him as a punishment for his sins. That gracious salutation, *Son, be of good cheer, thy sins be forgiven thee*, had otherwise been utterly impertinent to the matter in hand: which, thus understood, hath a direct tendency to comfort; and gave good hopes that, when the guilt was released, the penalty drawn down by it should not long continue. Thus our Lord approved himself a skilful and wise physician, by going to the root of the disease, and making it his first care to carry off the cause; which once removed, the malady itself receives a certain and an easy cure. And this is a point of great moment to be rightly understood, and very seriously considered. For to any Christian, who shall observe how our Lord was pleased to express himself upon other occasions of the like nature^t; what directions for the behaviour of persons upon the bed of sickness are left by his apostle^u; how express the Scriptures are, that not bodily death only, but all the decays of nature, all the pains and sufferings which afflict us while in this body, were originally introduced by sin; how the divine wisdom hath ordered that health and strength and long life should be natural consequences, no less than providential encouragements and rewards of virtue; and diseases and sorrows, and a more speedy dissolution, the ordinary effects of a vicious course; what threatenings and inflictions, lastly, of this kind we read in holy writ, as instances of a more immediate and vindictive justice: to any, I say, who shall impartially weigh these arguments, it will appear sufficiently plain at what door our languishings and bodily indispositions are of right to be laid: so that the case before us is by no means particular to the person concerned

^t Mark v. 34; Luke xviii. 42; John v. 14.

^u James v. 15.

in it, but is in this respect the case of all mankind. And however some, who carry their thoughts but a little way, may content themselves with ascribing such alterations to common accidents and natural causes; yet our excellent church (according to the usual wisdom conspicuous in all her offices) hath the truest reason in appointing her ministers to go to the bottom of this matter. For it is certainly of the last importance that we should put every sick person in mind, as I now do my readers in her own words^x, that *Almighty God is the Lord of life and death, and of all the things to them pertaining, as youth, health, strength, age, weakness, and sickness; wherefore whatsoever your sickness at any time is, know ye certainly that it is God's visitation.*

I call this a consideration of the last importance, because so proper and so likely to quicken men in the duties of prayer and repentance, examination of their lives and consciences, hearty sorrow for their past faults, serious and steadfast resolutions of amendment, and every holy exercise that may promote their living more to God's glory, if he spare them, and grant opportunities of proving their sincerity by a better life; or else may effectually prepare them for their great change, if he see fit to take them from among men. This would convince men of the absurdity, the wickedness of a preposterous method too much in use among our people; who generally begin their remedies at the wrong end, and are in no care to call in the Physician of the soul till the bodily physicians have given them over. How much a juster notion had the wise son of Sirach, what order ought to be observed by men in this condition! *My son, (says he^y), in thy sickness be not negligent, but pray unto the Lord, and he shall make thee whole; leave off from sin, and order thy hands aright, and cleanse thy heart from all wickedness. Give a sweet savour and memorial of fine flour, and make a fat offering, as not being. Then give place to the physician, for the Lord hath created him; let him not go from thee; for thou hast need of him. There is a time when in their hands there is good success: for they shall also pray unto the Lord that he would prosper that which they give, for ease and remedy to prolong life.*

Most excellent and seasonable advice, and strictly methodical. For, doubtless, when the chastisement of the Lord is upon us, our first care ought to be serious application to him that he would sanctify his corrections, and give a blessing to the means used for our recovery^z. The more effectually to invite this blessing, repentance is absolutely necessary, which may appease and reconcile us to our justly offended God^a. When thus qualified for nearer and more solemn approaches to him, (in correspondence to the Jewish sacrifices^b), communicating in the blessed sacrament of the Lord's Supper, offering that sacrifice of thanksgiving for the redemption of mankind by the death of the holy Jesus, and by the acts of praise and faith and charity proper to be exercised there, testifying our union with him our head, and every member of his body mystical; devoting ourselves entirely to his service, and by a perfectly contented resignation submitting to his will concerning us, whether for life or death. When our lamps are thus

^x Visitation of the sick, exhortation 1.

^y Ecclus. xxxviii. 9—14.

^z Vcr. 9.

^a Vcr. 10.

^b Vcr. 11.

trimmed, and our souls prepared for his wise disposals, then is the time for human advice and remedies*. To which recourse must be had, as means ordained by and subordinate to him, not as sufficient of themselves, or capable of doing any manner of service without him. As a proof of which persuasion I take the wise man here to have left us a good hint for making choice of such physicians who are likely to profit us by their prayers as well as by their prescriptions^d. For sure it argues too little sense of the hand God hath in all events of this kind when we lay our lives at the mercy of impious wretches, who do not only seem to have no reverence for our regard to God, but live in open contempt and defiance of his majesty, and are much more like to draw down a curse by their profaneness and irreligion than to give us any reasonable prospect of a blessing upon their undertakings. So full is this counsel of the son of Sirach to our present purpose;—so perfectly agreeable to the inference suggested by the method in which our Lord himself proceeded with the sick man in this day's Gospel, (viz.) that the sufferings of the body have their original cause in the disorders of the soul; and that as well on this account as because the soul is by far the more precious part of us, we never act regularly and Christianly in this affair, except when the healing of these is preferred before and leads the way to the removing of the other.

This were most certainly the best expedient for procuring, not only recovery from, but comfort under diseases and infirmities. The Psalmist speaks of God's *making all a good man's bed in his sickness*^e; that is, rendering it supportable and more easy to him than it is to common men. But how is this done, think we? Is not human nature the same in every man, and can virtue exempt any from the sense of pain or the droopings of a disease? The anguish of the very best is doubtless as sharp, and their feeling as quick and tender, so far as the body is concerned. But here is the difference, that they endure no more than the body is concerned in. Their pains are not pointed with the reproaches of guilt unpardoned, the amazing prospects of an angry God and a gaping hell, or any of those agonies and terrors of conscience which pierce the wicked through and through, and rend his very soul in pieces. They are sustained by perfect peace within, and in the midst of outward sufferings comforted by the favour of God, and the light of his countenance shining in upon their hearts. This brings refreshment and relief in their extremities, that they can look through the cloud, and behold a glorified Saviour, who did for them in the same nature *grieve* and droop and bleed and die, and yet is now at the right hand of God. They hear this joyful voice sustaining them—*Son, be of good cheer, thy sins are forgiven thee*. And if he think not fit to second it with that other in this Gospel—*Arise, and take up thy bed and walk*, they are sure to hear him say something better, even—*Well done, good and faithful servant, enter thou into the joy of thy Lord*^f.

I only add, in the last place, that this man's particular distemper presents us with a lively image of every habitual sinner. The palsy is occasioned by a general relaxation of the nerves and muscles, which

* Ver. 12, 13.

^d Ver. 14.

^e Psalm xli. 3.

^f Matt. xxv. 21.

for want of the animal spirits duly distributed renders those parts in a manner dead, and disables them quite for the discharge of their proper functions. And such is the case of a hardened and customary sinner; whom the Scripture calls *dead in trespasses and sins*, because incapable of exerting himself in any operations of the spiritual and divine life. This incapacity proceeds from those infirmities which obstruct the kindly influences of the Spirit of God, the true and only principle of holiness. Till therefore this impotent wretch be brought to Christ, till he have likewise received the blessing of forgiveness, till such pardon and reconciliation have prepared the way for that grace which alone can give him power to rise, which alone can strengthen him against falling again, which alone can inspire him with inclination and ability to walk in the way of God's commandments, no cure can be effected. And thus the example set before us in the Gospel justifies the wisdom of the Collect for the day. It proves the truth and justice of that acknowledgment there made to God, that *without him we are not able to please him*; and it shews the necessity of that request which we ground upon this acknowledgment, when beseeching him *mercifully to grant that his Holy Spirit may in all things direct and rule our hearts, through Jesus Christ our Lord.* Amen.

THE TWENTIETH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY.

THE COLLECT.

O ALMIGHTY and most merciful God, of thy bountiful goodness keep us, we beseech thee, from all things that may hurt us; that we, being ready both in body and soul, may cheerfully accomplish those things that thou wouldest have done; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

THE EPISTLE. Eph. v. 15.

15 *See then that ye walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise,* 15. In regard therefore the difference is so great between the religion you have left and that which you have now embraced, let your behaviour be wise and cautious; tempered between an easy compliance with temptations and unseasonable vehemence in your carriage.

16 *Redeeming the time, because the days are evil.* 16. Making the best of these bad times of persecution; and not exposing yourselves to unnecessary dangers.

17 *Wherefore be ye not unwise, but understanding what the will of the Lord is.* 17. Judging discreetly what are the proper seasons of exposing yourselves to danger for the sake of your duty.

18 *And be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess; but be filled with the Spirit;* 18. Give no offence by any intemperance and ex-

cess, which in the heathen Bacchanals was esteemed an act of religious joy.

19 *Speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord;*

20 *Giving thanks always for all things unto God and the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ;*

21 *Submitting yourselves one to another in the fear of God.*

This refers more especially to the several conditions and orders of men; the duties peculiar to which the apostle immediately descends to as so many exemplifications of this general rule of submission.

19, 20. But let your mirth and joy be spiritual and holy, and expressed not in drunkenness, but in pious hymns, &c. See paraphr. on Epistle for the fifth Sunday after Epiphany.

21. See Epistle for the third Sunday after Trinity.

COMMENT.

THE wisdom or circumspection required by St. Paul in this place, though it may very well be understood of Christian prudence in its utmost extent, is yet by very eminent interpreters presumed to bear a more especial regard to that instance of it mentioned in my paraphrase. And the *evil of the days*, brought as an argument to enforce it, to mean that sort of dangers and temptations more particularly which the enemies and persecutors of the Christian faith, and their readiness to take all advantages of any imprudence and want of conduct in the professors of it, did at that time expose the Ephesians to. In this sense the advice contained in the fifteenth, sixteenth, and seventeenth verses is of the same importance with that to the Colossians^a, *Walk in wisdom toward them that are without*: and with our Lord's direction to his disciples^b, *Behold, I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves: be ye therefore wise as serpents, and harmless as doves*. Concerning which prudence of behaviour, and the proper season of declining danger, enough, I think, hath been observed from the practice of our blessed Saviour himself when withdrawing from his enemies^c.

The fitness of that method here prescribed for expressing the joy and thankfulness^d and other pleasing affections of the mind, as becomes Christians, in spiritual songs and hymns of praise, and particularly in that collection of Psalms for which the Church hath always shewed an extraordinary regard, hath likewise been sufficiently demonstrated in a former discourse^e.

The subject therefore which at present I choose to insist upon is the duty of thankfulness; which could not be expressed in terms more full and forcible than those at the twentieth verse, *Giving thanks always for all things unto God and the Father, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ*. The reasonableness of doing this may appear, whether we consider our duty or our interest: I will briefly speak to two motives under each of these heads. Shewing it, under the former, to be an

^a Col. iv. 5.

^b Matt. x. 16.

^c Gospel for the fifth Sunday in Lent.

^d Ver. 18, 19.

^e Epistle for the fifth Sunday after Epiphany.

act of justice and an act of religion; and under the latter, to be such as contributes to our pleasure and our profit.

1. First, thankfulness is an act of natural justice: a common principle agreeable to the practice of every part of the creation. All which are so ordered by Providence as to sustain the world by reciprocal supplies, and beneficial returns of what they had formerly received. Thus the waters of the ocean feed and expand themselves into rivers, and those rivers wind into channels, and run back to pay their tribute to the sea again. The sun is fed by vapours from the earth, like a lamp by the oil, and those vapours condensed descend again in fruitful showers upon the earth, and furnish matter for new exhalations. The ground gives its product for the sustenance of man and beast; and that product, by putrifying, manures and fattens the ground from whence it was taken. Man is the only monster of ingratitude; and such he cannot be neither till he have vitiated his own reason, and become a reproach to human nature. For nothing is more suitable to our first notions of morality than that every kindness ought to be paid back again. Those large and generous minds who consider the comforts of life and the conveniences of society as owing to a friendly intercourse of good offices between man and man prove this persuasion, by being as useful as possibly they can; and for any good done to them they imitate nature, which restores manifold, and for a small quantity of seed rewards the sower with a plentiful increase. And those niggardly capricious men who affect to live by themselves, and suffer none of their neighbours to do them service, do in effect confess this principle. For while they are too proud or too humoursome to receive a kindness, they own it is because they hate to be obliged, and consequently that every benefit contracts a debt. Hence is that general resentment and abhorrence of ingratitude, as an argument of a base and abandoned mind. It was this cut David so deep, that the man *who had eat of his bread should lift up his heel against him*: this that aggravated the treachery of Judas, and the apostasy of the devil himself; that persons so signally favoured, so highly exalted, should turn betrayers and murderers and rebels. Hence it comes to pass, that although several vices, as murder, and rapine, the dishonouring of our beds, and the injuring our good names, are attended with more pernicious consequences; yet few, if any, are more shocking, and wound our reputation deeper than this. Which could not be did not all mankind naturally concur in their apprehensions how great a branch of equity thanks are. And therefore the owning ourselves obliged, though a phrase commonly of course and compliment, does yet carry a great deal of signification at the bottom. Bills and bonds do indeed engage us with more solemnity and form, but courtesies and good turns do the thing as effectually, and a man of virtue and honour will always think so, and will be sure to behave himself accordingly.

It is true, we are not always in a condition to make proportionable returns: but where we want the power, we ought to shew we do not want the will. Requitals are necessary where opportunities offer; otherwise thanks and respect must supply their place, that what we

do may testify what we would gladly do. And this is our case with regard to Almighty God. Retributions in kind he expects none: the perfection of his nature and the weakness of ours will not admit of any. But acknowledgments he does demand and insist upon; and the graces which we cannot repay we must not overlook nor bury them in silence. For,

2. Secondly, thanksgiving is likewise positively commanded as an act of religion. We are required in the general to *do all to the glory of God*^f. Not that we, strictly speaking, can add any thing to his glory; nor must that be supposed to depend upon such poor impotent creatures as frail sinful men. But help to illustrate that glory we may, by magnifying his liberality, proclaiming it aloud, inviting and encouraging others to serve him, by cheerfully and entirely devoting ourselves to a Master whom we acknowledge infinitely good, infinitely bountiful; one who does not only reward our deserts, but distributes his gifts abundantly above all that the very best of us do or ever can deserve. And this is the genuine interpretation of all our thanks; this the reason why we are commanded *in every thing, by prayer and supplication*^g, with thanksgiving, *to let our requests be made known unto God*. This justifies the method of that prayer which our Lord himself was pleased to compose for our use; wherein we are taught to ask, first, that *our heavenly Father's name may be hallowed*; and that *his kingdom may come, and his will be done*; before we presume to beg *our daily bread*^h. This the reason why God by the Psalmist says, *Whoso offereth me thanks and praise he honoureth me*ⁱ. And why the apostle enjoins us here *always and in all things to give thanks, because* (as he elsewhere hath it) *this is the will of God concerning us*^k. It shews that we believe him the Disposer of all our affairs, and that we believe all his disposals to be wise and just and good; that all we receive from his providence is not a debt but a grace, an over-measure which we could lay no claim to. And upon these accounts to insist upon our thanks is by no means below Almighty God. It is only to do justice to himself, and to prevent our very great crime of neglecting and undervaluing his mercies, and our obligations to love and please him. For it is a certain and a reasonable maxim, that although the person who does good offices could be content never to remember them, yet it is the unquestionable duty of the person to whom they are done never to forget them.

Now from hence it must needs follow, that every one who forgets God's goodness and lovingkindness is exceedingly to blame, because these extend to every one without exception. Not to every one in the same sort and degree, but (as hath been formerly observed^l) to every one in several sorts, and to a very great degree. All have not increase of riches and honour, a numerous offspring, a sound constitution and perfect health, to bless God for. But if we have not abundance, have we not a competency? If not a growing fortune, have we not a comfortable and sanctified use of a small one? If not that neither, and we cannot subsist upon our own possessions and labour, yet

^f 1 Cor. x. 31.

^g Phil. iv. 6.

^h Matt. vi. 9, 10, 11.

ⁱ Psalm l. 23.

^k 1 Thessa. v. 18.

^l Gospel for the twelfth Sunday after Trinity.

have we not some good friends whose hearts God hath opened to sustain us out of theirs? If we have not gained in the business of our calling, like some more prosperous neighbours, yet have we not escaped a world of disasters, by which the wealth of some others hath been diminished? Did none within our knowledge ever suffer by floods, or fire, or storms, or fraud, or robbery, or war, or captivity? And what made this difference between us and them but the distinguishing providence of God? Though then some are in more flourishing circumstances than others, yet all have reason to be thankful that their own circumstances are so well. If they have not been raised by prosperity, yet that they have been defended from, or at least supported in their dangers and adversities: that they have not been afflicted, or that they were afflicted no more, or that they have been so to good purpose. But supposing the most calamitous condition of sickness and sorrow and poverty and pain; is it not even then a mercy that we are still in a state of trial; that we are not yet cut off, and called to our last terrible account, nor the great, the impassable gulf fixed between us and all happiness and all comfort? For sure no miseries of the present life can be imagined so deplorable, but a wise and good man will feel their bitterness allayed by considering that they are not irreversible; that they may, nay, that they must shortly have an end: and that in the meanwhile they may with our due care and improvement become instruments of adding to our everlasting bliss. Thus, if we look at temporal things only, which yet bear no proportion to the spiritual and eternal, it appears that those men are unjust and irreligious even to a degree of stupidity who do not discern the bounty of God toward them, and pay him for it this most unexceptionable tribute of praise and thanksgiving.

II. But I have yet fresh motives worth considering; such as relate to our interest, and prove this both a pleasant and a profitable virtue.

I. First, I say, thankfulness is a duty full of pleasure. *My lips* (says David) *will be glad when I sing unto thee; and so will my soul, whom thou hast delivered*^m. And again, *O praise the Lord, for it is a good thing to sing praises unto our God, yea a joyful and pleasant thing it is to be thankful*ⁿ. Of all the services God hath appointed, this seems to be singular, by the exercise of it bringing no regret, no allay, not even to men of carnal minds and very mean attainments in religion. Temperance wages a perpetual war with appetite; mortifications and fastings deny and subdue flesh and blood: alms take from one's self that which is given to others. Prayer brings us nearer to and maintains a familiar correspondence with God; it obtains a supply for wants, and a rescue from miseries: but at the same time it asks redress for, it awakens the remembrance of miseries and wants. And that which is painful to bear cannot be easy to reflect upon. But thanksgiving turns the bright side of our fortunes, and hides the dark and melancholy part from our sight. It presents us with that which we wished most vehemently to have; such as we met with open arms when moving toward us; and therefore such as we cannot

^m Psalm lxxi. 21.

ⁿ Psalm cxlvii. 1.

but look back upon with a sensible relish and delight. This recollection is a sort of acting our past happiness over again; it makes it in a manner always present, and repeats the enjoyment while it refreshes the memory.

Doubtless the generality of Christians are therefore unjust, not only to their great Benefactor in heaven, but extremely so to themselves, by the neglect of this duty. For the practice of it would go a great way toward curing that querulous and fretful temper which utterly destroys their quiet and content. And instead of giving way to black thoughts and aggravating every little misfortune, it would teach them to weigh all things in an even and just balance. And how partial or cruel soever any may in their dull moods represent the providence of God, yet when they shall sit down and bring their crosses and their blessings to a fair account, so astonishing a disproportion will quickly appear as must needs strike all their murmurs dumb both for the weight and number of their comforts and their sorrows. For the case and disposition of such people resembles that of Jonah; they rage at the withering of a gourd, and forget the miracle of the whale's belly°. Their calamities come seldom, and they cut deep, and leave broad and lasting scars; their mercies are renewed every morning, every moment, but yet no mark of these is left behind. This is one great cause why we have so much melancholy, so much complaining, so much ill-humour in the world; and for one really unfortunate, this is the vice of many unthankful and unmindful men: whose misery is not, that they receive no good, but that they see none and remember none. Which renders their condition a great deal worse than if themselves said true. For none can be accountable for what was not received; but woe to thee, ungrateful wretch, who hast received and not improved, not enjoyed, nay, who slanderest and blasphemest the goodness of God by lamenting thyself as though thou hadst not received it!

2. Secondly, the profit of this duty is no less than the delight of it. For it is in this regard with God as with wise and good men, that nothing recommends to a subsequent kindness more effectually than decent acknowledgments for a former. His goodness is a perpetual spring, always overflowing, always communicating itself in one kind or other; and only directing its streams where they are most wanted and best received. But if the soil be barren and unthankful, he turns the channel, and enriches some other ground of a better disposition. So true it is of God's gifts of every kind, that to *him that hath* (that acknowledges and uses what he hath thankfully) *more shall be given, and he shall have abundance: but from him that hath not* (from the ungrateful and unprofitable receiver) *shall be taken away even that which he had before*†.

But the expectation of additional blessings is not all. We are also to look at a sanctified use of those we have already, and such a favourable assistance of Almighty God as may order every enjoyment to its proper end. The Preacher's observation concerning riches is equally true of all temporal advantages—that *there is a time when they*

° Jonah i. 17. ii. 10. iv. 8, 9.

† Mark xiii. 12.

are kept to the owners thereof to their hurt¹. For though these things are instruments, yet they are but instruments, they are by no means sufficient causes of our happiness. Not necessarily good in themselves; nor will they without a supernatural benediction and influence prove in the event good to us. Meats and drinks are made for sustenance, and naturally endued with a nutritive faculty; but whether they shall strengthen the body or nourish a disease will depend upon the will of God and the management or constitution of the person. Health may be a curse, if made an occasion of indulging our lusts; and sickness proves a blessing when it reclaims us from a wicked course of life. The case is much the same with all the rest. None of which have so direct a tendency to evil that a temper may not be found for converting them to profit; nor are any of them so determined to good that they cannot miss of their proper aim and efficacy. Nay, even grace itself, though the seed of eternal life in our hearts, is yet capable of being turned into lasciviousness²; and may produce *thistles instead of wheat, and cockle instead of barley*³.

But it is with the unthankful only that these gifts have such dire effects; and that *the things which should have been for their wealth prove an occasion of falling*⁴. For God always follows gratitude with his distinguishing mercies. And in truth it is one great part of gratitude to consider not only what is bestowed, but by whom and for what end it is bestowed; to walk worthy of, and profit by, and study how we may answer all the excellent purposes of God's liberality to us. This makes us use prosperity with temper, and entertain adversity with patience. This inclines the Almighty Giver to *perfect every good work he hath begun in us*⁵: and to direct every instance of his bounty to our true and everlasting interests. Thankful to him we cannot be, except our lives express it; and then the result of our gratitude is a sanctifying every dispensation of Providence to us. For this will tend to increase our portion, if that be expedient; and if it be not, it will so dispose our hearts, that, be it less or more, the advantage shall be equally certain; and the least degree thus improved shall suffice for the accomplishing that merciful and best of all designs, even the bringing us at last to that happy place, where we shall render continual honour and praise and thanks to God the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, for ever and ever. Amen.

THE TWENTIETH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY.

THE GOSPEL. St. Matt. xxii. 1.

1 Jesus said,

2 *The kingdom of heaven is like unto a certain king, which made a marriage for his son,*

3 *And sent forth his servants to call*

See Gospel for the second Sunday after Trinity.

¹ Eccles. v. 13.

² Jude 4.

³ Job xxxi. 40.

⁴ Psalm lxxix. 22.

⁵ Phil. i. 6.

them that were bidden to the wedding : and they would not come.

4 Again, he sent forth other servants, saying, Tell them which are bidden, Behold, I have prepared my dinner : my oxen and my fatlings are killed, and all things are ready : come unto the marriage.

5 But they made light of it, and went their ways, one to his farm, another to his merchandise :

6 And the remnant took his servants, and entreated them spitefully, and slew them.

7 But when the king heard thereof, he was wroth : and he sent forth his armies, and destroyed those murderers, and burned up their city.

8 Then saith he to his servants, The wedding is ready, but they which were bidden were not worthy.

9 Go ye therefore into the highways, and as many as ye shall find, bid to the marriage.

10 So those servants went out into the highways, and gathered together all as many as they found, both bad and good : and the wedding was furnished with guests.

11 And when the king came in to see the guests, he saw there a man which had not on a wedding garment :

12 And he saith unto him, Friend, how comest thou in hither not having a wedding garment ? And he was speechless.

13 Then said the king to the servants, Bind him hand and foot, and take him away, and cast him into outer darkness ; there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

14 For many are called, but few are chosen.

COMMENT.

GREAT part of this scripture * hath been formerly spoken to upon occasion of another so very nearly allied to it, that, to the end of the tenth verse, both are in substance and design exactly the same. Referring therefore my reader back thither for so much of it, I shall only detain him with a few remarks upon some little diversity of circumstances and expressions in the former part ; and two or three

* Gospel for the second Sunday after Trinity.

reflections, which more peculiarly belong to the latter part of this day's Gospel.

1. Now, first, this representation differs from St. Luke's by calling it a marriage feast. Upon which occasion the rejoicings of the Jews were so remarkably magnificent and solemn, that no metaphor could possibly be thought on capable of carrying the point higher, or more worthy the joys of the Messiah's kingdom. But there was besides a great propriety in the figure with regard to the thing signified by it. The incarnation of the Son of God uniting the divine and human nature in one person; the joining all believers in one mystical body, of which himself is the head; the inviolable affection expressed to his spouse the Church, by washing away her deformities and blemishes in his own blood; and the inseparable conversation and mutual delights reserved for the great day of consummating that marriage in heaven²; all these are reasons for that resemblance being frequently used in the New Testament; as well as the greatness of that joy which they who are now admitted to the foretastes of in the kingdom of grace shall be eternally feasted and filled with in the kingdom of glory.

2. A second thing observable here is, that the invitations at different times, attributed by St. Luke to one servant, are in this passage ascribed to several. In such circumstances it is not the manner of parables to be critical, in regard they are incident and ornamental only. But if we will descend to niceties, by the servants at the third verse who invited beforehand, we may do well to understand Moses and the prophets, John Baptist, and, if you please, even Jesus himself. By those at the fourth, who brought word of the dinner being actually ready, those apostles and disciples who preached Christ then crucified; for this Lamb already slain it was that must correspond to that part of the invitation—*My oxen and my fatlings are killed, and all things are ready; come unto the marriage.*

3. A third circumstance peculiar to this passage is the manner in which these refusers are said to have treated the persons at whose hands they had received such gracious invitations. Not content to turn the deaf ear to all kind messages and repeated importunities, they flew upon them with rage and spite implacable; loaded them with all sorts of injuries and indignities, and with a most unrelenting as well as unreasonable barbarity persecuted, tormented, and put them to death.

4. Once more. St. Matthew is particular in his mention of the course taken by the king to express his indignation against such unworthy and obdurate contemners of his majesty and his mercy: *He sent forth his armies, and destroyed those murderers, and burnt up their city*¹. These two last circumstances are so exact a description of what the Jews did and suffered shortly after our Lord's death and resurrection, that nothing could more punctually determine the intent of this parable, or mark out the events then principally in view. The cruelties they inflicted upon all who dared to preach or profess Jesus Christ, the return of unheard-of cruelties upon their own city and nation by the Romans, are too well known to need enlargement. And the many, the pro-

¹ 2 Cor. xi. 2. Eph. v. 23—32.

² Rev. xix.

³ Matt. xxiii. 7.

ditions tokens of Divine wrath which attended the siege and sacking of Jerusalem, were so plain indications of a particular commission from God to act as instruments of vengeance upon an ungrateful, refractory, and inhuman people, as might well justify the significance of that phrase which says this angry king sent forth his armies and destroyed them.

I have now done with my observations arising from the variety of circumstances and expressions in the two evangelists that have left us this parable. Let us now proceed to a very material addition made by St. Matthew, and entirely his own; from the eleventh to the fourteenth verse. This ministers a new subject of thought, and just matter of fear; by shewing that a bare compliance with the invitations, and appearing at this feast, would not suffice; since even among them that came we have an instance of one not only not received, but sorely punished for not coming in *a wedding garment*. This opens a scene of very weighty speculations; some of which I shall touch upon, and then close with a brief explanation of that aphorism wherewith our Lord shuts up the whole parable.

The apostle, speaking of the church's marriage to the Lamb, says, *To her it was granted that she should be arrayed in fine linen, clean and white, and the fine linen is the righteousness of saints*^c. This passage will help us in explaining the wedding garment; and shews that by it are intended all that purity of mind and conversation, all that charity and those good works, which are the genuine fruits and evidences of a truly Christian faith. So that the person thrust out for want of such a garment is an emblem of all them who profess and receive, but do not live up to the principles of Christ's religion. Their embracing of these, and being baptized into them, is an acceptance of the invitation, and a coming to the feast. But their coming in so irregular and indecent a garb, not *putting off the old man with his affections and lusts*, nor *putting on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness*^d, does as effectually exclude them from the saving benefits of this feast, as if they had never been persuaded of the truth, and so never come at all.

But how shall we account for this defect not having been discovered, except by the king himself, *when he came in to see the guests?*^e The good works here designed are expected to be a *light shining before men*, such as *they may see*, and by the sight be induced to *glorify their Father which is in heaven*^f. It is true the works themselves are visible, and they who behold them are in reason and charity bound to think the persons good who do them. But it is no less true, that many actions in appearance good may proceed upon false, indirect, and mean views; and be owing to corrupt and wicked principles. What men do, others may know; but for what designs and upon what motives they act, God only and their own consciences know; and therefore this is one of the discoveries reserved to the last great day of inquiry. So that I conceive we shall not do amiss to interpret this wedding garment of the inward holiness and sincerity of men; between which and the counterfeit show of goodness none but this King

^c Rev. xix. 8.^d Eph. iv. 22-24.^e Matt. xxii. 11.^f Matt. v. 16.

is able to discern; and without which no outward guise or face of religion, how artfully soever put on, can stand us in stead. For all who *do not the will of God from the heart*^s, and who study to please men rather than him, are hypocrites, and must expect the hypocrite's portion, which, we know, as well as that of unbelievers, is to be *cut asunder*, and condemned to *weeping and gnashing of teeth*^h.

A severe indeed, but withal, it must be confessed, a just punishment; for, as the not having on a *wedding garment* is therefore a crime, because such indecency betrays a disrespect, and a contempt of the solemnity and the master of it, so the want of that which is signified by this garment is aggravated by the dishonour it puts upon Almighty God. And this is very grievous and very manifest, whether we suppose this want to consist in dissembled piety or in open irreligion.

Dissimulation is a fault which when detected every man naturally takes ill, because it implies an opinion of weakness in the party thus practised upon. And were it not for the hopes of concealment, there would be no such thing as a dissembler in the world. How great an indignity then must it needs be to offer this affront to Almighty God, the *searcher of hearts*, that *understands our very thoughts*ⁱ, that *requires truth in the inward parts*^k, before whom *all things are naked and open*^l, and who hath expressly declared, that he will *bring every secret thing into judgment*!^m This is in effect to rob him of one of his most glorious attributes, and to deal with him as if he were such a deceivable creature as ourselves. And common sense will tell us how just an indignation a procedure so disingenuous, so dishonourable, so vain as this, must needs move in the majesty of the just and jealous God.

On the other hand, open irreligion in a Christian brings a scandal upon a religion which is of all others best fitted to make men eminently good. It utterly evacuates the main end of it, which is to correct and refine depraved nature, and to raise them to a spiritual and divine life. It furnishes the most perfect rules, and sets before us the most noble examples, threatens the dreadfullest punishments, excites by the most excellent rewards, and ministers the most powerful assistances to these purposes of any that is or ever was in the world.

Now, though somewhat may be said in mitigation of their crimes upon whom the gospel hath never shined, yet what plea can be found in bar to justice against such as live under the clearest light, and yet walk on in darkness, that grope and stumble and fall at noon-day? Undoubtedly the absurdest mixture in the world is that of a Christian faith and an heathenish conversation; and as it is the most absurd, so is it the most inexcusable. Whence it is that the person in this parable is said to have been *speechless*, struck dumb with confusion and the reproaches of his own guilt. For what answer is that man capable of making who professes one rule and proceeds by another; who lives in constant contradiction, not only to the laws of God, but to the sense and dictates and acknowledgments of his own breast?

^s Eph. vi. 6.^h Matt. xxiv. 51.ⁱ 1 Chron. xxviii. 9.^k Psalm. li. 6.^l Hebr. iv. 13.^m Eccles. xii. 14.

Well were it, if as one such only is taken notice of here, so the number of profligate believers were proportionably small. But this is done, according to the usual decency of our Lord's parables, to avoid offence or discouragement, by extenuating the worse and melancholy side of the case. This one then is or ought to be warning sufficient to us all, that we be not wanting to ourselves in the ornaments becoming our profession. The grace of God is ever at hand, ready to provide us with this garment, and nothing but our own negligence or folly can either sully it or divest us of it.

Lastly, What hath been said on this and the like occasion formerly may suffice to instruct us who are the *called*, and who the *chosen* of God. All to whom the knowledge of Christ and his religion is come, whether they embrace it or not; and those that embrace it, whether, after embracing it, they live agreeably to it or not; all these are the *called*. And they who do embrace and live up to it, these only are the *chosen*. Chosen freely, because without any thing on their part to deserve, but not so as that nothing should be requisite on their part to incline, this choice. For those works, which are by no means to be allowed as a *meritorious* cause, because accepted only in and for the sake of Christ, (the only meritorious cause of our salvation,) are yet necessary in the quality of an instrumental and conditional cause, because *without holiness no man shall see the Lord*^a.

The ministers and word of God, and his holy sacraments, are the means whereby we are ordinarily called. To neglect these is to reject God's call; to attend them hypocritically and formally, and rest upon these ordinances without a life suitable to them, is to come without a wedding garment. To hear, and read, and pray, and communicate, and live accordingly, is to follow the apostle's advice, (which he would never have left us, if we had no part or concern in this great work ourselves,) that I mean of *giving all diligence to make our calling and election sure*^o. Which that we may effectually do, let us earnestly beseech God, as directed in the collect for this day, *of his bountiful goodness to keep us from all things that may hurt us, that we, being ready both in body and soul, may cheerfully accomplish those things that he would have done, through Jesus Christ our Lord*. Amen.



THE TWENTY-FIRST SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY.

THE COLLECT.

GRANT, we beseech thee, merciful Lord, to thy faithful people pardon and peace, that they may be cleansed from all their sins, and serve thee with a quiet mind; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

THE EPISTLE. Eph. vi. 10.

10 *Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might.* Christian combat ye are called to; and sustain yourselves by the consideration of his power whose grace is able to sustain you against all your enemies.

11 *Put on the whole armour of God,* 11. In fighting with whom it will be necessary for you to make use of that complete armour provided for all that fight God's battles, that so ye may be in every part defended against the stratagems of the devil.

12 *For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places.* 12. For the enemies ye have to encounter are not men only, but evil spirits, that still rule in the hearts of ignorant heathens and persecutors; and have their stations on high in the regions of the air.

13 *Wherefore take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand.* 13. Let no part therefore of this armour of God be neglected; that ye may be able to keep your past and subdued by any conflicts ye shall come into.

14 *Stand therefore, having your loins girt about with truth, and having on the breastplate of righteousness;* 14, 15, 16, 17. See the comment.

15 *And your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace;*

16 *Above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked.*

17 *And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God:*

18 *Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints;* 18. To these defensive weapons ye must add your most earnest prayers, and your constant watchfulness.

Persevering in both these, and interceding with God for all Christians in general, that they also may come off successfully in this spiritual encounter.

19 *And for me, that utterance may be given unto me, that I may open my mouth boldly, to make known the mystery of the gospel,* 19, 20. For me in particular, that God would give me opportunity of preaching his gospel publicly and courageously, as I now suffer imprisonment for discharging my commission from God in that respect.

20 *For which I am an ambassador in bonds: that therein I may speak boldly, as I ought to speak.*

COMMENT.

THE Epistle for the last Lord's day made mention of the *evil days*, that is, the season of great calamity and danger, then lying upon the church of Ephesus. This at present under consideration gives a particular account wherein the evil of those days consisted; what course was to be taken for fortifying themselves against it; and what behaviour was necessary in order to their safety in it. I shall therefore, as clearly and as briefly as I can, speak to the three following points. First, The danger of these Ephesians, and in proportion of Christians in general; described here at the eleventh and twelfth verses. Secondly, The armour of God, which they are exhorted here to put on as their defence and security. And lastly, The directions for so demeaning themselves, as that they might come off with honour and safety in this dangerous encounter.

I. I begin with the danger of these Ephesians, described in those words, *That ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil; for we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places.*

The devil is that great enemy of mankind whom the Scripture so often represents as continually intent upon the eternal ruin of souls. And for instructing us how formidable this enemy is, we have him sometimes set forth under characters that speak the utmost malice and rage. Thus St. Peter compares him to *a roaring lion that goes about continually seeking whom he may devour*^a. But beasts of prey are what we expect no better from, and therefore take care to avoid and stand upon our guard against them. The danger were in this respect but single, were force and fierceness all we had to fear, and open assaults the whole we are concerned to make provision for. Whereas it is a terrible aggravation of ours, that the foe we have to engage is no less subtle than violent and implacable. The *wiles* mentioned here are therefore those ambushes and snares he lays for us; the stratagems by which he overreaches, the deceits by which he blinds us, and the flatteries and counterfeit appearances of friendship by which, like Joab in the case of Amasa^b, he pretends to kiss, that he may stab us to the heart. This *cunning craftiness whereby he lies in wait*^c, men are too seldom aware of; and therefore multitudes are destroyed when they least suspect it. They trust to that beautiful face he puts on, when *transforming himself into an angel of light*^d; and are easily surprised by an enemy, whom the habit and countenance of a friend gave them no manner of warning to resist or make escape from.

And yet even this danger, great as we have seen, is much increased by the multitude and the condition of the instruments employed in it. Such are, in the first place, wicked men, meant here by *flesh and blood*. It being an idiom usual in Scripture to describe any whole (as here the human nature) by some of the principal parts of which it is compounded. And we must observe, that the apostle, in saying *we*

^a 1 Pet. v. 8.^b 2 Sam. xx. 9, 10.^c Eph. iv. 14.^d 2 Cor. xi. 14.

wrestle not against flesh and blood, does not mean to exclude them, but to include others. He warns us that these are not the only, not that these are not any of the enemies we have to combat with. The malice and envy, the injuries and vexations, the opposition and persecution, in which both Jews and heathens joined against the Christian faith and its professors, are all comprehended under *flesh and blood*. And so are likewise all the errors and false doctrines whereby artful men labour to corrupt this faith: and so again are all the softer methods of ill persuasion and ill example, the treacherous allurements or flattering promises of favour and friendship, security and advantage, made use of to cajole and tempt us to any sinful compliances. These all are meant by *flesh and blood*; as well as that bitterness and violence, whose end it was to discourage the steadfastness of Christians, and affright them from their duty.

But these, though very many and very dangerous, are not, it seems, the worst of our spiritual adversities. There are *principalities and powers* also; terms used in Scripture to denote the angels, good or bad indifferently; because referring to the different orders and distinctions, and different degrees of power, in which both sorts are constituted^c. But several texts have restrained these titles to the evil angels, without leaving us at liberty to understand the whole species of those intellectual beings. Thus St. Paul seems to do, when denying that *angels, or principalities, or powers*, (any the most elevated and potent among them all,) *shall be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ*^f. Thus he plainly does, when affirming our blessed Saviour to have *spoiled and triumphed over principalities and powers* by his death^e. And thus most evidently in the place before us, by calling these *the rulers of the darkness of this world, and spiritual wickednesses* (or, as some, *wicked spirits*;) *in high places*. The true importance whereof seems to be, that such are officers and ministers of the devil, whom our Lord, more than once, calls *the prince of this world*^h; and St. Paul, in the second of this Epistle, (a passage that gives great light to the character of his subordinate powers mentioned here,) styles him, *the prince of the power of the air, the spirit which now worketh in the children of disobedience*ⁱ.

To explain this a little more fully, let it be observed, that among the Jews, and heathens also, there prevailed an opinion of all the regions of the air being full of spirits, ranged in order military, and punctually obedient to the command of their respective chiefs. To this the passages just now referred to have given so much countenance, that many pious and learned Christians have thought the same. And I conceive we may venture to say it hath generally been believed, that as there are multitudes of good angels constantly attending upon, and doing kind offices for, and by all means in their power promoting the safety and happiness of God's faithful servants, so there are likewise multitudes of evil angels as constantly waiting about and contriving the misery and destruction of men. So that, as the former are ministers of God employed by him for our good, the latter are

^a See Eph. i. 21. iii. 10; Col. i. 16; 1 Pet. iii. 22.

^f Rom. viii. 38, 39.

^e Col. ii. 16.

^h John xii. 31; xiv. 30; xvi. 11.

ⁱ Eph. ii. 2.

ministers whom the devil, by God's permission, employs for our hurt and mischief. And notwithstanding the masters and the purposes they serve be as different as is possible, yet in this both sorts agree, that each are continually intent upon that very thing to which each are respectively appointed. These have been supposed to be instruments and occasions, not only of the good and ill events that befall us, but also in great measure of the good and ill actions done by us. This they are presumed to do by working upon our imaginations and affections, by the objects they lay before our senses, by the manner and light in which they represent these, by the thoughts they suggest, and the opportunities they offer for determining us to the one or the other kind of them. So that, as our safety and our virtue are owing to an invisible and mighty protection and assistance, our sin and ruin are likewise brought about by enemies of unwearied watchfulness, of wonderful activity. And upon that account formidable above all others, because both they and their attempts upon us are subtle and unseen; such as work in and with and by the passions and corruptions of our own minds, even when we are least aware of any such operation.

II. As the enemies we must engage with, so are the arms that must defend us from them, of a spiritual nature also. And these come now in the second place to be considered: which shall be briefly done, by observing the nature and the uses of each of them as here described.

First then, we are commanded to *have our loins girt about with truth*. The use of a girdle is twofold: it contributes to our activity by keeping all the under garments close and tight, and preventing the hinderances that come from their flying loose about us. And it contributes to our strength by supplying the place of bones, and keeping those parts between the upper and lower body firm, which nature hath left liable to bend and yield, and so to great enfeeblings, by being in the heat of action wrenched and overstrained. The former consideration seems more particularly to concern the priests under the law^k, who were commanded to make this a part of their habit: and servants, who, in those countries where long and loose garments were worn, could not without great inconvenience want a part of clothing so necessary for expedition. The latter more especially (but both indeed) made it so essential to soldiers, that the whole of their armour is frequently implied by it. To servants our Lord applies it, by commanding his disciples to *let their loins be girded*^l, as a mark of their readiness to receive their Master. To either servants or soldiers we may suppose those words of St. Peter spoken, *Wherefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and hope unto the end*^m. But here it is manifestly made a part of the military habit: and *truth* is the girdle which every soldier is to be girded withal.

Now by *truth* here I understand the gospel of Christ; and by being *girded* with that truth, such a firm persuasion of all the doctrines contained there as strengthens the weaknesses of human nature, and will not suffer us to give way, either to the corruptions or tho

^k Exod. xxvii. 4, 40.

^l Luke xii. 35, 36.

^m 1 Pet. i. 13.

terrors, the threats or the allurements, that would shake our belief, or taint our sincerity in the profession of it.

2. The next advice is to *have on the breastplate of righteousness*: a just and holy conversation; such as is at once a consequence and an evidence of the sincerity spoken of before. Such as is careful, not only not to be reproached with evil, but to shine in good works. And this is very fitly called *the breastplate*, the proper use of which is to defend the heart: whether we consider this as the seat of the affections, which the custom of doing well will render impregnable against the temptations to sin; or whether we consider it as the seat of the conscience, which, while a good life preserves it unwounded by guilt and shame, proves the best support against afflictions and disquiet, and the strongest defence from the malice of devils and wicked men.

3. A third direction is to *have our feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace*. The account how Goliath, the champion of the Philistines, was dressed out for the field, takes notice that he had *greaves of brass upon his legs*. And nothing is more usual in the poets and historians, than a mention of boots as one part of the soldier's equipment. A necessary part no doubt to defend the feet and legs in their marches from the heat and roughness of the ways; but especially from those sharp stakes that were driven into the ground to gall, or other obstructions laid to stop the enemy in his passage. Of these the Jews in particular are said to make use, upon the approach of Holofernes and his army: and the original word^o, translated there *impediments*, being the very same which we so often find rendered by *offences* in the New Testament, may do us some service toward a right understanding of the defence provided here against the dangers of this kind.

The gospel of peace may be so called, either because it is a sure and solemn declaration of peace to sinners reconciled to God by Jesus Christ, or because it lays upon all its professors indispensable obligations to peace with all mankind. In this latter sense it supplies the place of the military shoes, by preserving that temper in our minds, and that conduct in our actions and common conversation, which neither gives offence to others nor is apt to take it: and so does, as it were, defend the feet by warding off those resentments and uneasinesses, with which in common conversation the injurious dealings of wicked and malicious people are apt to gall men easy to be provoked, and to prove very dangerous temptations by so doing. And as this disposition saves the ill consequences of malice and persecution; so does it in some measure prevent persecution itself, and secure men against all enemies not yet arrived to that degree of barbarity which *harms even those which are followers of that which is good*. In the former sense, the comforts resulting from a mind at peace with God, though they do not keep off all feeling of afflictions and wrongs, yet do they not suffer this to become an occasion of stumbling or falling, by terrifying us from or discouraging us in our duty. And in both senses this is properly called *the preparation* or readiness of *the gospel of peace*; because it prepares men for any conflicts they shall meet

with, and arms them against all obstructions thrown in their way on purpose to stop or retard their Christian course.

4. A fourth and principal part of this armour is faith, recommended here in particular manner to be *taken above all, as a shield wherewith we shall be able to quench the fiery darts of the wicked* ^v. By *fiery darts* some understand poisonous and mortal, as those *serpents* are called *fiery* whose stings were full of venom; others think it an allusion to those red-hot iron balls used to be slung in sieges especially to set fire to any combustible matter they light upon. These *darts* no doubt are temptations, by which our natural passions, like that combustible matter, are subject to be inflamed; but which, when the impenetrable shield of faith is interposed, are received and beaten back again without any manner of damage. Meanwhile, by comparing faith to a shield, its universal efficacy is intimated. For whereas other parts of this armour are prescribed for the defence of some one part of the man, this, by being dexterously managed and opposed to the blow wheresoever directed, is a guard and cover to the whole man. The fitness of which metaphor, in respect both of the nature of this virtue and of its sufficiency for repelling and overcoming temptations, I have no need to enlarge farther upon now, after what hath been discoursed upon this subject heretofore ^q.

5. Another necessary part of our spiritual armour is *the helmet of salvation* ^r, or (as this apostle elsewhere explains himself) *the hope of salvation* ^s: a due sense (that is) of the inestimable prize promised to them that conquer, and an assured expectation of obtaining it, provided we *strive lawfully*. The contemplation of this incorruptible crown is very fitly compared to an helmet; that defence which guards our principal and most vital part, the seat of our understanding, and the source of our animal powers. For where this hope prevails it will effectually secure us against all attempts upon our life made by suggestions to sin; whose force and danger chiefly consist in such motives as are in no degree comparable to those which must be forfeited and lost by any wicked compliances. And therefore we need not doubt the power of that preservative which fully persuades and satisfies the mind that all temptations bid us infinitely to our loss, and put us upon such measures as it cannot possibly be, at any time, or under any circumstances, consistent with our interest to go in to.

6. Concerning the last particular, *the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God*, I have taken occasion to deliver myself at large ^t, when considering the experiment made of its wonderful efficacy, and the pattern set us for the use of it, by the victorious *Captain of our salvation*; who did with it *hew the snares of the ungodly in pieces*, when tempted by the devil in the wilderness.

I conclude my second head with these two remarks: (1.) That this is styled *the armour of God*; and that not only on account of the service it does in promoting godliness, but because it is entirely formed and furnished by him. *The truth and the righteousness, the peace and*

^p Numb. xxi. 6.

^q Epistle for the first Sunday after Easter.

^r Eph. vi. 17.

^s 1 Thess. v. 8.

^t See Gospel for the first Sunday in Lent.

the faith, the salvation and the word, are his gifts. And thus what heathen poets feigned to be done for their heroes is actually done for every truly Christian combatant. The moral of their fiction being unquestionable and just, that no armour except that of Divine original is so tempered as to render us invulnerable in the day of battle.

(2.) It deserves our very diligent attention that, in order to our safety, the *whole* armour of God is absolutely necessary. Profession of the *truth* will not suffice without practice; nor works of *righteousness* without *peace*, and so on. But all together will enable us to *withstand in the evil day, and having done all to stand*. And of this also the philosophy, or rather the religion, of the poets had some notion; which, finding a necessity of leaving their heroes mortal, did for that purpose contrive to leave some one part unguarded, and thither to direct the weapon of the enemy.

III. I come now, in the last place, to observe the directions given to these Ephesians for so deporting themselves against those enemies under my first, and in the management of this armour under my second head, that they might come off with safety and honour in their dangerous encounter. Of which very briefly.

1. By representing the multitude and the quality of our enemies under the first head, the apostle plainly intends to awaken our care and provoke us to action. And this point indeed ought to be more frequently and more seriously laid to heart than generally it is. For to what but the want of this consideration can we ascribe the wretched negligence and sloth, the thoughtlessness and profound security in which the greater part of Christians spend their days? Alas! our danger calls for all our activity and thought; and all is little enough to obtain victory at last. But then do we most effectually give advantage to and take part with our enemies, when we seem to forget that we have any enemies at all: and their defeat in this spiritual war is unavoidable who say to their own souls, *Peace, peace*, when there is not, cannot be peace.

2. By the subject of my second head we are taught not to be discouraged or sink into despair by reason of the danger described under the first. This shews us where our strength lies, that neither are we left naked and defenceless, nor are the foes we have to wrestle with invincible. To have bidden us *be strong*, and *stand* (as we say) upon our own legs, against such enemies, had indeed been most absurd. But when we are commanded to be *strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might*, to *put on the armour of God*, and to resist under his assistance and protection; this proves them that are with us to be more and mightier than all that are or can be against us. It shews that we go out against them in the name of the Lord of hosts, the God of battles; and under the cover of one who can, nay, who actually did conquer them long ago. It proves that courage and vigour, resistance and resolution, diligence and perseverance, are required on our part. We must fight and maintain our ground, and not expect deliverance and conquest without our own endeavours;

but if we continue fighting, we shall not fail both to keep and get ground; because armed and strengthened by one who will not fail to bring us off, when those endeavours are sincere and constant.

3. In order hereunto it is necessary, that as our exigencies and wants are, so our requests for seasonable recruits in this war should be pressing and continual. That no opportunity be lost by our neglect, nor any assistances either withheld or withdrawn for want of application. And because the danger and the cause are common, our concern must be so too. Ourselves cannot be safe without that charity which gives us an interest in the safety of every Christian: for no member of this mystical body is made, or fights for, and therefore none ought to regard or pray for, himself alone. And because in this as in the body natural, every member is not of the same use and consequence; therefore our prayers should be in more especial manner for those by whose labours and the success of them the welfare of the whole is more especially promoted. Such was St. Paul with regard to these Ephesians; such in proportion are all ministers of the gospel to their respective charges. Each whereof may very reasonably bespeak, and each ought certainly to be heard when he does bespeak, the constant intercessions of his people. For though we are not *ambassadors in bonds*, yet we are all *ambassadors*; if not strictly and first to *make known the mystery of the gospel*, yet to press faith and obedience to it in places where it is already known; to instruct the many ignorant even there; to comfort the feeble-minded; to support the weak; to warn the unruly; and to oppose gainsayers. In all which we have great occasion for the prayers of good Christians, *that utterance may be given to us, that we may open our mouths boldly*, and, in despite of difficulties and discouragements, *may speak upon all occasions as we ought to speak*.

THE ONE AND TWENTIETH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY.

THE GOSPEL. St. John iv. 46.

46 *There was a certain * nobleman, whose son was sick at Capernaum.*

47 *When he heard that Jesus was come out of Judaea into Galilee, he went unto him, and besought him that he would come down, and heal his son: for he was at the point of death.*

48 *Then said Jesus unto him, * Except ye see signs and wonders, ye will not believe.* before your own eyes will be accepted by you as sufficient confirmation of the truth of my doctrine.

49 *The nobleman saith unto him, Sir, come down ere my child die.*

50 *Jesus saith unto him, Go thy way;*

46. * An officer in the court of Herod the tetrarch.

48. * No evidence less than that of miracles done

thy son liveth. And the man believed the word that Jesus had spoken unto him, and he went his way.

51 And as he was now going down, his servants met him, and told him, saying, Thy son liveth.

52 Then enquired he of them the hour when he began to amend. And they said unto him, Yesterday at the * seventh hour the fever left him.

53 So the father knoweth that it was at the same hour, in the which Jesus said unto him, Thy son liveth: and himself believed, and his whole house.

54 This is again the second miracle that Jesus did, when he was come out of Judæa into Galilee.

it was that the nobleman came to him. See the beginning of verse 46.

52. * About one in the afternoon his distemper went quite off.

54. This is the second miracle that Jesus did in Cana of Galilee: for thither

COMMENT.

THE conversion of this nobleman and his family is the more remarkable, because he is the first person of that quality and station that stands upon record for receiving the faith^u. His style here is such as seems to imply not only dignity and honour, but also office and great authority. From such our Saviour generally found not neglect only, but even aversion to him and his doctrine. And by some circumstances in this account reason is given us to suspect that the person concerned in it was once no better disposed. For when in great extremity he besought our Lord's assistance, the answer^x plainly reproves a weak and slow and too scrupulous faith: which though delivered in general terms, did yet, most probably, point at him in particular, as one whom no evidence of doctrine, no credible testimony, nor any thing less than miracles^y brought home to his own senses and his own benefit, would convince. To this infirmity however our Lord graciously condescended in the manner and with the success which the Gospel of this day relates. Upon each I shall make some observations as briefly as conveniently I can. And,

1. First, of the manner of our Lord's proceeding. Which deserves the more notice, because so very different from his behaviour to an inhabitant of the same city, a dependent upon the same court, and in a case of very like nature. When a centurion, whose servant lay sick at Capernaum too, solicited his help, the message met with this encouraging reply—*I will come and heal him*^z. Accordingly, without the least delay, our Lord was moving thither; but stopped by this most noble yet humble declaration of his faith, *Lord, I am not worthy that thou shouldst come under my roof, but speak the word only, and my servant shall be healed*^a. Now here a person in much more eminent

^u Ver. 46.

^x Ver. 47.

^y Ver. 48.

^z Matt. viii. 7.

^a Luk. evii. 6, 7, 8.

post makes pressing application that he would *come and heal his son*; a relation as much dearer as the figure of the courtier was superior to that of the centurion. And yet we find nothing like the same readiness in complying with this request. Which I mention for this very purpose, that, by comparing the cases together, it may appear that our Lord did what we may discern to be highly prudent and proper in each of them.

The centurion was duly sensible both of our Lord's power and his own unworthiness. To him therefore the kindest advances were made that those preventions might furnish an opportunity for rendering both his humility and his faith exemplary and public. This nobleman seems rather to look for attendance and respect, and to have thought that nothing less than our Lord's own presence could do any service; nay, and that even this, if not quickly granted, would come too late. This imperfection of his faith is expressed in that second instance made ver. 49, *Sir, come down, ere my child die*. He therefore was to be treated another way: to be taught that the Messiah is no respecter of persons, that the outward state and dignity is of far less regard with him than the inward disposition and virtue of the man: to be convinced he is a God as far off as well as near at hand; and that one single word at a distance should be as effectual to the patient as a sight of him, or a touch, or any corporal application whatsoever. These are instructions and convictions which could not so fully have been given had our Lord complied with the first entreaty, and gone down to the house. And therefore he contrived a method of more coldness and reserve, to make at once the miracle appear greater, and the effect and benefit of it upon the asker greater and more successful too.

That success I am in the next place to consider. By which I mean the conviction this miracle wrought upon the nobleman and his family described at the fifty-third verse, by *himself believing and his whole house*.

By his own believing we are to understand that a consideration of the power and goodness of Christ in raising his son from that languishing and hopeless condition disposed him to attend to his doctrine, to acknowledge his Divine authority, and to become his disciple upon a reasonable and full persuasion of the truth of both. By his *whole house believing* is meant that he did not content himself with these improvements of that mercy made singly in his own person, but took good care to propagate all possible effects of this miracle, and to press the natural consequences of it upon as many as his capacity gave him any command or influence over. In both he is and ought to be our example. For all deliverances should have the like operation. We do not, God be blessed, need the former part, of being brought to the confession of Christ and his gospel; but, alas! we need but too much to be quickened and confirmed in the faith we make profession of; and to be put upon using all our might for establishing and advancing others in good principles and practices: for which the fresh experiments of God's great goodness to us minister very proper occasions.

1. Every deliverance should confirm and quicken our own faith. For this is often unactive and heavy, and therefore should be invigorated and excited. And often also in seasons of danger and distress it is subject to great oppression and discomposure, by melancholy misgivings and dark thoughts; and upon this account should be strengthened and settled. Now nothing puts into our hands fitter opportunities for both these purposes than the reliefs God is pleased to extend to us in our extremity. Comforting us under trouble, raising us up from poverty, recovering us from a dangerous sickness, and the like, do undeniably prove and bring this truth home to our own feeling, that God is both able and willing to save; that no calamity can be a match for his power, nor any suffering so justly provoked as to shut out the greatness of his mercy.

The instance of this kind to which I at present would confine myself is that of sickness: desiring to prosecute the advice I had lately occasion to give^b for the behaviour proper upon a bed of languishing, by adding somewhat fit to be observed upon the recovery of our strength again.

When therefore the art and expectation of man is at a stand, and the soul faints away because of the trouble; if, even from the gate of the grave, God by a wonderful kind providence restores one to his family and his friends, to his ease and his capacity for business, to his comforts and the assemblies of his saints; can any more powerful encouragement be imagined, to rely upon the Almighty's protection with an unshaken dependence for the future? Will not such a man's past experience prepare and arm him to encounter the like again, or any other difficulty that shall threaten or assault him, with greater steadiness and resignation of mind than can reasonably be expected from common men? They too may have heard and read and seen and meditated much upon the instances of God's power and goodness to others: but all this comes far short of feeling it in their own case. For the more sensible any demonstration is to us, the deeper and more durable impression it should and naturally will make. Hence it is we find the Israelites so oft and so severely upbraided, because their infidelity had this peculiar aggravation, that God had sundry times signalized himself on their behalf; and they notwithstanding upon every new danger gave themselves up for lost, and as much doubted his assistance as if they had never felt it before. And what indeed can excuse the despondence of them, who, if they would recollect those things, which of all others ought not to be forgotten, are able to say to their own drooping spirits—"Why art thou so full of heaviness, O my soul, and why art thou so disquieted within me? still put thy trust in God^c: this is not the first time thou hast had cause to fear; not the first adversity thou hast been rescued from; and consequently thou canst have no reason to doubt but the same mighty Deliverer can, and, if he see it most expedient, will turn again and refresh thee; take thee out of the mire and deep waters, that thou sink not; and put a new song of praise into thy mouth, by snatching thee out of the jaws of this death also."

^b See Gospel for the nineteenth Sunday after Trinity.

^c Psalm xliii. 5.

After this manner are such instances of service to us for the confirming our faith; but it is necessary they should quicken it also: that is, render it more vigorous and exerting, more fruitful in good works, more zealous in acts of piety and devotion, and every way more concerned for a deportment suitable to the service of a Lord so gracious and kind to us. If our obedience be a tribute owing to God as the Author of our life and being, and every enjoyment to us; then as oft as that life is in imminent danger and called back again from destruction, we are to look upon ourselves created as it were afresh, and this obligation bound faster in proportion as it is repeated upon us. And which way shall we answer it to God if that time be not devoted to his use which he hath granted us a new term of years in, when the former was just upon the point of expiring? especially if we reflect withal that those very diseases are chastisements for sin, and that we have been respite from cutting off for this very purpose, to prove whether such corrections have had their intended effect.

Those things carry such plain reason along with them, that few people are so profligate as not to express this sense, and entertain resolutions suitable to it, while the rod of God is upon them. How very large and liberal in their promises do the beds of sickness generally make those that are cast upon them! And what a mighty change are we bidden to expect in them from that very moment! I wish I could not say that such engagements have lost much of their credit too deservedly, with those who would be extremely glad, not only to find them, but to lend their best assistance towards making them true. But, alas! no sooner is the smart of this rod over, but the remembrance of it is commonly over too. Men return to their health and their sins together; and prove that all those vehement detestations came not from any settled aversion to their lusts so much as from want of relish and opportunity to gratify them; or else from such dejection of animal spirits as naturally magnifies our fears; rather than from such sincere compunction as accompanies the grace of *repentance not to be repented of*^d.

Let me therefore most earnestly conjure every Christian to lay to heart this general corruption. Think how disingenuous, how provoking this dealing is; how unthankful and treacherous to Almighty God; how cruel and injurious to yourselves. For what can be supposed the end of such unfaithfulness, but that he, who in pity to your unpreparedness for your great change, and in condescension to your prayers and vows of living better, hath in mercy lengthened out your days, will, at a time when you are least aware, cut you off in your sins, and bring you at last to utter and unconceivable destruction both of body and soul?

As therefore ye, with David, have been ready to cry aloud for succour, and seek God in the *anguish and bitterness of your souls*; so with him likewise it becomes you to be diligent in preserving a punctual remembrance of all that passed between Him and you in that day of fear and sorrow. Not only frequently to think upon, but conscientiously to *pay the vows which you promised with your lips and spake*

with your mouth when you were in trouble^c. For be assured in the great day of reckoning these will make a very considerable article in every man's account. And woe to them especially against whom the abuse of mercies so earnestly implored, so gladly received, and the breach of promises so solemnly made, shall then rise up in judgment.

2. But, secondly, as our own piety should be carefully promoted upon these occasions, so, to the utmost of our power, should that of others also. In order hereto public returns of thanks and an humble approach to the Lord's supper are very advisable. For what can be more seasonable than this sacrament, as it is by way of eminence the Christian sacrifice of praise; as it is a mark of our communion with all the faithful, to the public congregation of whom it hath pleased God to restore us; and as the best expedient for confirming and repeating our holy resolutions, by dedicating to God afresh those lives and persons which we have now once again received from his bounty?

Besides, we should take all proper occasions of recounting with thankfulness the lovingkindness of the Lord, the benefits we have been loaded with, the requests we have obtained, the dangers and miseries we have escaped. For these remembrances will bring a sensible satisfaction to ourselves, and inspire courage and confidence into others by the example of our successes. But especially care must be taken that such publications of the Divine bounty be not empty and formal; but such as approve their sincerity by a holy and exemplary life; without which the loudest praises only serve to condemn the speaker of so much more unworthiness and hypocrisy. In short, no endeavours should be wanting to oblige those under our command, and to persuade them that are out of it, to serve God faithfully and cheerfully; to convince them that he never *forsakes his that be godly*^f; that *they who obey him shall want no manner of thing that is good*^g; that *they who trust in him shall not be confounded in the perilous time*^h; and they who do or suffer any thing for his sake shall in no wise lose their reward. This is the only return we are capable of making to God for the abundance of his compassion and love; and it is what he vouchsafes to accept and approve. Let us therefore with most devout and affectionate hearts admire, adore, and serve him; and account it our greatest joy, by example, persuasion, and every holy act, to increase the number of his zealous worshippers upon earth now, and of glorified saints in heaven hereafter.

THE TWO AND TWENTIETH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY.

THE COLLECT.

LORD, we beseech thee to keep thy household the Church in continual godliness; that through thy protection it may be

^c Psalm lvi. 13, 14. ^f Psalm xxxvii. 28. ^g Psalm xxxiv. 10. ^h Psalm xxxvii. 19, 39.

free from all adversities, and devoutly given to serve thee in good works, to the glory of thy Name; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen^a.

THE EPISTLE. Phil. i. 3.

3 *I thank my God upon every remembrance of you,*

4 *Always in every prayer of mine for you all making request with joy,*

5 *For your fellowship in the gospel from the first day until now;*

6 *Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ:*

7 *Even as it is meet for me to think this of you all, because I have you in my heart; inasmuch as both in my bonds, and in the defence and confirmation of the gospel, ye all are partakers of my grace.*

8 *For God is my record, how greatly I long after you all in the bowels of Jesus Christ.*

9 *And this I pray, that your love may abound yet more and more in knowledge and in all judgment;*

10 *That ye may approve things that are excellent; that ye may be sincere and without offence till the day of Christ;*

11 *Being filled with the fruits of righteousness, which are by Jesus Christ, unto the glory and praise of God.*

7. This concern and good opinion is due to the zeal you have shewn for the gospel, by your care for me, and suffering in the same cause with me.

8. I can therefore safely call God to witness for the sincerity and earnestness of my affection² toward you.

COMMENT.

THE manner of St. Paul's expressing himself here to the Philippians bears so near a resemblance to that to the Corinthians, which hath been already considered^b, as renders several things then observed very applicable to the present occasion. But two particulars there are besides in the scripture now before us, which must not be passed over without notice taken of them.

As, first, the nature of that confidence which the apostle professes himself to have of their perseverance in goodness and truth. Which is by no means that absolute and undoubted assurance of salvation, imagined by some to be not only possible, but fit, nay, necessary to be entertained by every faithful Christian; but such as is proportioned to the

^a 1 Cor. i. 8; Phil. i. 6, 10, 11.

^b See Epistle for the eighteenth Sunday after Trinity.

arguments on which it stands, and accommodated to the condition of the persons whom it concerns.

The first and main foundation of this confidence is the mercy and truth of God; in nothing more conspicuous than in his constant readiness to improve and cherish, to increase and perfect his own graces, when not obstructed by our abuse of them. This hath been observed in the place referred to before.

It is a great confirmation to this argument when the grace and assistances vouchsafed by God appear to have been not bestowed and received in vain. For, as to entertain no hopes of people doing well, when they have abilities and opportunities put into their hands, would be even before trial highly uncharitable; so, not to have good confidence of their continuing to do well, after plain proofs and experience of their having done so hitherto, would be manifestly unjust. And this was the case of these Philippians. The improvements they had made from their first conversion to the faith; the zealous concern they had expressed for this apostle, by whose ministry they had been converted; and not only the regard they bore to his sufferings, but the constancy and firmness of mind so conspicuous in their own, for the same common cause of Christianity^c, were noble evidences of their good principles and resolutions. Such as, joined with that bounty of God, which *gives to them that have*, were a very just ground of the confidence mentioned in this place. A confidence which could not have risen so high upon a mere judgment of charity. Nor is it built upon any notions of an absolute and arbitrary proceeding, abstracted from the circumstances and character of the parties concerned. Nor is it such as forgets that those parties are still men, and yet in a state of hazard and trial. For these very persons are exhorted in the next chapter to *work out their salvation with fear and trembling*^d. And upon all these accounts a confidence in St. Paul concerning his converts, from whence we shall do well to take a standard of the confidence which every good man is allowed to entertain concerning himself. Such as results from a careful examination of his own state; and is so adjusted as to rise in the same degrees with his advancement in piety and virtue. In a word, a confidence not totally exclusive of fear; but so due a temperament of both, that the one shall never degenerate into security and presumption, nor the other sink into inactivity and despair.

Secondly, it is very observable that the increase of *knowledge* and *judgment*, which the apostle here begs of God in behalf of these Philippians, is mentioned as a consequence of their *love*^e. The benefit of this *judgment* is to *approve the things that are excellent*; or, (as the original may very well import,) to make a right and just distinction in the different nature and consequences of things; and in pursuance of that, to choose and stick by those that are truly profitable and good. And the ability to do this is certainly a proper subject for a prayer; there being no instance wherein the grace of God seems more needful than the keeping us clear of those partialities and prejudices and worldly interests, which are so apt to warp us in matters relating to

^c Ver. 29, 30.

^d Phil. ii. 12.

^e Ver. 9.

our duty. And this grace God hath promised to conduct them by who sincerely study to serve and please him. So that as one sort and degree of knowledge is antecedent to practice, there is another (the increase and the abounding) consequent to it. Consequent in the nature of the thing; in regard a holy life delivers us from many obstructions which blind and corrupt our judgment; and consequent by virtue of those many promises of the more especial guidance of the Holy Spirit. All which our Saviour in effect comprises in that one, that *if any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God*. This is the likeliest way to secure us against all error in matters of religion; but it is a certain way of securing us from all that is dangerous and destructive. We shall at least not fail to know enough for our purpose, and so much as may preserve us *sincere and without offence until the day of Christ*.

THE TWO AND TWENTIETH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY.

THE GOSPEL. St. Matt. xviii. 21.

- 21 *Peter said unto Jesus, Lord, how oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? till seven times?* 21. From the directions given before concerning offences of public scandal, St. Peter took occasion to inquire what behaviour is necessary in case of injuries that are private, and, even after pardon and promises of amendment, are frequently repeated. See Luke xvii. 4.
- 22 *Jesus saith unto him, I say not unto thee, Until seven times: but, Until seventy times seven.*
- 23 *Therefore is the kingdom of heaven likened unto a certain king, which would take account of his servants.* 23. The measures by which God will proceed with men under the gospel may be understood by this following parable of a king, &c.
- 24 *And when he had begun to reckon, one was brought unto him, which owed him ten thousand talents.*
- 25 *But forasmuch as he had not to pay, his lord commanded him to be sold, and his wife, and children, and all that he had, and payment to be made.* 25. His lord determined to take the extremity of the law upon the insolvent debtor.
- 26 *The servant therefore fell down, and worshipped him, saying, Lord, have patience with me, and I will pay thee all.*
- 27 *Then the lord of that servant was moved with compassion, and loosed him, and forgave him the debt.* 27. So good was this lord as to exceed the servant's request, and not only forbear, but forgive the debtor.
- 28 *But the same servant went out, and found one of his fellow servants, which owed*

him an hundred pence : and he laid hands on him, and took him by the throat, saying, Pay me that thou owest.

29 And his fellowservant fell down at his feet, and besought him, saying, Have patience with me, and I will pay thee all.

30 And he would not : but went and cast him into prison, till he should pay the debt.

31 So when his fellowservants saw what was done, they were very sorry, and came and told unto their lord all that was done.

32 Then his lord, after that he had called him, said unto him, O thou wicked servant, I forgave thee all that debt, because thou desiredst me :

33 Shouldest not thou also have had compassion on thy fellowservant, even as I had pity on thee ?

34 And his lord was wroth, and delivered him to the tormentors, till he should pay all that was due unto him. intended pardon, and executed that severity of the law upon this wretch which he had done upon his fellow-servant.

35 So likewise shall my heavenly Father do also unto you, if ye from your hearts forgive not every one his brother their trespasses.

34. His lord, full of indignation at such unworthy treatment, retracted this intended pardon, and executed that severity of the law upon this wretch

COMMENT.

THE design of this parable, whereof the Gospel for the day consists, is sufficiently clear ; both from St. Peter's question^b, which gave occasion to it, and from our Lord's application in the text, which declares the use he would have us make of it. Upon that therefore I shall principally insist. But would, before I come to fix there, briefly recommend some few observations which our Lord's manner and expressions in the circumstantial parts of the parable seem very naturally to suggest to us.

1. The first thing I observe is, the great propriety of that comparison which represents our sins under the notion of debts. For no man surely needs be told that by the king here is meant Almighty God ; by reckoning with his servants, the bringing men to account for their actions and behaviour in his service ; by the *ten thousand talents* due to that king, the grievous, the numberless offences against God, with which every servant of his stands charged ; and by the *hundred pence* owing from one servant to another, the injuries and affronts and every sort of provocation that pass between man and man. Consequently, the barbarity of the ungrateful servant will answer to our bearing malice and taking revenge when such provocations are given :

and that servant being at last delivered to the tormentors, imports the heavy condemnation which spiteful and merciless man incur; when their own measure comes to be meted back to them in the great day of account, and they who would not forgive by God's example shall perish by their own. Such is the plain analogy of the parable, all turning upon this ground, that every man is obliged to satisfy the law; that where that law hath been transgressed, it acquires a right of demanding and a power of inflicting such penalties as the wisdom of the enactor hath prescribed in such cases. And therefore, as punishing the sinner is exacting the debt, so remitting the debt is a release, and quitting all claim to revenge, and affording to the person faulty all instances of humanity and peace and Christian charity, as if such debt had never been contracted; that is, as if such fault had never been committed at all.

2. We shall do well in the next place to take this otherwise wicked servant as our pattern, in the earnestness of that submissive application for mercy and forbearance (ver. 26). Thus when our consciences smite us for our guilt (the reproaches whereof may reasonably be allowed for our Lord's *beginning to reckon with us*, ver. 24), the proper course to quiet our fears is a due acknowledgment how just those fears are. In this sense we should betake ourselves to God, and with all possible humility and reverence own the greatness of the debt, deprecate the heavy displeasure we have deserved, and sincerely promise our utmost care to make amends hereafter for that improvident and undutiful course of life which hath already brought us so deeply in arrear. Thus far the servant acted as became him, that he did not dispute any article in the account, nor presume to justify himself, in bar to the severity of that sentence pronounced against him: but he cast all at his lord's feet, and reposed his hope entirely in his goodness and compassion.

3. The greatness of which is a third, and surely a most comfortable consideration, presented to our thoughts by this parable in a very extraordinary manner. For other scriptures content themselves with such descriptions of the Divine mercy, as, that God will abate of the punishments we have incurred, by not *dealing with us after our sins, nor rewarding us according to our wickedness*¹; by helping the miserable, forbearing the sinner, and forgiving the penitent when they cry unto him: but the passage before us is an instance of his granting a great deal more than was desired. Patience and time for payment was the whole subject of this debtor's petition; but a total release and generous discharge was the consequence and effect of it. So abundantly does this Lord, plenteous in goodness and compassion, do even for his once ungracious servants above what *they ask or think*; more than they have the confidence to expect, more than they have the power to imagine it possible they should ever obtain. But all this goodness still proceeds upon conditions, and presupposes a frame of mind sensible of and thankful for it; namely, a readiness to express that sense and gratitude by the like condescension and forgiveness so often as occasions call for, and so far as differences of circumstances

¹ Psalm ciii. 10.

admit the practice of them. This is the main point to which the whole parable tends—pardoning of injuries done to us by our brethren; and that enforced upon these weighty considerations, of standing in need ourselves to be forgiven, and of being sure to forfeit in our own case from an offended God that mercy which we refuse to those who have offended us. Here it is fit I should, because it is evident that our Lord does principally fix. The strength of whose argument it shall be my endeavour to explain, not by discoursing upon the duty of forgiveness at large, but by insisting upon some particulars more especially remarkable in the passage now before us. To this purpose I design to represent the peculiar manner,

I. First, of our Lord's expressing this duty.

II. Secondly, of his describing our danger in not discharging it. And,

III. Thirdly, of his illustrating our mighty obligation to it.

1. Of the duty itself it is remarkable, first, that our Lord hath in this place chose to express it by *forgiving* from the heart *every one his brother their trespasses*. It hath been already observed that this forgiveness is equivalent to the quitting of a debt, or wiping out of a score. And the words now under consideration imply, that the holding our hands from any act of revenge, or a carrying it fair outwardly, will not suffice, unless our most secret resentments of anger be so far quieted as to stifle all remembrance of the wrongs we have sustained which may abate of our charity to the doer of them. This is the forgiveness we desire at God's hand, that our past provocations may be no bar to his future bounty and love. And consequently this is that we are bound to exercise towards men; a forgetting all they have done amiss so far, that the good wishes and good offices, fit for our condition and theirs, shall not be obstructed by recollecting such offences to their disadvantage.

I am well aware how hard flesh and blood is to be brought to such a temper; and what pretences are used to make this appear an impracticable virtue; destructive of our own safety, and evacuating all the methods which the wisdom of every society hath found it necessary to provide for guarding its members against, or helping them to redress from, the injuries and insults of malicious wicked people. And therefore, to set the matter in its true light, and effectually to deliver it, if possible, from the ignorance of the mistaken, and the sophistry of the designing objectors against this duty, I would propose that the following cautions may be seriously attended to:

1. That the subject I am now upon regards private injuries and private revenge, but hath little or nothing to do with that punishment and vengeance which persons in public authority are by their office obliged to inflict upon offenders.

2. That Christians are not hereby forbidden, absolutely and upon all occasions, to right themselves by legal process. It may indeed, and sometimes does happen, that they are bound to endeavour this for the chastisement of offenders, the terror of ill men, and the security of order and peace. For where the public interest is concerned we are not at full liberty to put up injuries. It is mercy many times

to depart from our own ; but it were injustice many times to give up more than our own. And accordingly he who in this parable commands every one to forgive, is not at all inconsistent with himself, who had but just before commanded his disciples in some circumstances to *tell the church* ; and if that did no good, to let the transgressor be *unto them as a heathen man and a publican* ^k.

3. But thus far we certainly are bound, even with regard to such cases ; not to contend or give trouble for small matters, nor to be vexatious and spiteful in any. To demean ourselves with that temper and moderation which becomes men seeking justice, the common good, and the reclaiming of disorderly people ; not private revenge, or the harm and suffering of the party. In short, to use no unfair means for getting our adversaries at our mercy, and to treat them with humanity and tenderness when we have them at our mercy. —

4. It should be remembered that Christian charity does not exclude Christian prudence ; and therefore this parable, which obliges us to forgive those who have wronged, affronted, or abused us, does not oblige us to continue the same dealings or the same familiarities as if they had constantly approved themselves faithful, and made proper returns for our former kindness. We must refuse them nothing to which they have a right, under the character of men or of Christians ; but we are by no means tied to lay ourselves open to fresh injuries ; to let them into our secrets or concerns ; to choose them for our agents or our advisers, or most particular confidants, or dearest favourites and friends.

5. Once more ; this parable supposes the offender to be sorry for what is past, to have made submission, and heartily to desire forgiveness. And though his obstinacy will not excuse our rancour and uncharitableness, yet will it justify such a prudent coldness and distance as may be of use to make him sensible of his fault. But when he sees and sincerely repents of it ; then we are to meet him half way, and receive him with open arms : and every fresh proof of his remorse and amendment must engage suitable proofs of our entire reconciliation.

Whatever a Christian is allowed to allege against forgiving enemies and injuries will fall, if I mistake not, under these limitations. And all without that compass can be of no great weight for dispensing with this duty ; the neglect whereof involves us in a danger, the very particular manner of representing which to us is the

II. Second thing I proposed to consider. Now several other scriptures cut off all hopes of being forgiven by God from them who refuse to forgive their brethren : but those words—*So likewise shall my heavenly Father do also unto you*, referring us to the king's procedure in the parable as the measure and pattern of God's dealing with us ; this application seems to carry the point higher than any other passage relating to this matter. For this I conceive to be a very remarkable circumstance, that the servant's debt is in the parable represented as actually remitted ; and yet, upon denying the like grace to his fellow-servant, that favour is retracted, and he *delivered over to the tor-*

*mentors*¹, as if the debt had never been released. Now *the gifts of God are said to be without repentance*^m; and it is manifestly one thing not to grant a pardon, and another to withdraw it again when granted. This is a difficulty in the application of the parable, for reconciling which to our notions of the justice and unchangeableness of Almighty God, we shall do well to take the following particulars along with us:

1. That eternal death and torture being in strictness the deserved wages of every wilful sin, God may justly inflict this punishment on a sin so heinous as uncharitableness. And according to this construction here is no need of retrospect; for thus the unrelenting servant suffers not for his former crimes, but for the last, of hardheartedness only. This, in the language of the parable, is a debt; a debt incapable of being satisfied by the contractor, and contracted afresh since the release of the old one. Consider,

2. That it is agreeable to all the measures of justice and equity to punish those criminals more severely who have abused the mercy of the government extended to them formerly. And so this servant and all whom he resembles may be said indirectly to suffer for former facts; and some new fact excludes them from that mercy which this had found, had they not continued insensible and unreformed by that grace of which they so largely tasted when guilty and obnoxious heretofore. For governors must vindicate the honour of law and justice; and patience, when perverted to ill purposes, naturally turns into rigour. But then the pardon is not in this case properly revoked; rather, by producing no fruits of amendment, it becomes accidentally an occasion of anger more fierce and vengeance inexorable.

3. This manner of proceeding may be an intimation that the pardon of sin, like all other spiritual blessings, is but imperfect, and suspended upon conditions during our continuance in the present world. That we now have it, as divines sometimes speak, in *inchoation* only; but are to wait for our full and final absolution in the sentence of God's great day. Now these beginnings, and the present comforts of them, are such as keep us still upon our good behaviour. They may be forfeited and lost by relapses into vice; they proceed and are confirmed upon a supposal of our conversion and perseverance; but wickedness not forsaken cancels the act of grace, and brings all our old guilt back upon us again. Nor is this any reflection upon the truth and constancy of God, in regard the change is not in him but in ourselves; and so, as St. Chrysostom in the present case expresses it, the king did not falsify, but the inhuman servant defeated his own grant of mercy.

Some or all these ways, especially allowing for the figurative style of parables, will abundantly suffice to resolve the difficulty before us. But which of them soever we take, the necessity of forgiving others is exceeding clear and strong. For every way we have an experiment in view, not only of a bar put to mercy for the future, but of mercy past and already received rendered ineffectual, nay turning to the party's greater condemnation, by refusing to discharge this duty. All

¹ Ver. 27. 34.

^m Rom. xi. 29.

which is yet more powerfully enforced by the third observation I proposed, viz.

III. The manner of illustrating our mighty obligation to it. Which is done by comparing the two cases together, and so shewing the disparity between them. Now that disparity consists chiefly in three things: the parties concerned, the quality of the debt, and the ability of making satisfaction. These are differences, each of them deserving our most attentive consideration.

1. For that of the parties first, our sins against God are a *debt to a King, a trespass upon a Father*; those of men against us are between servant and fellow-servant, brother and brother. One known aggravation of any fault is estimated by the quality of the person offended; and the capacities which God is here represented under are such as do above all others render sinners in this respect inexcusable. His dig-nity and distance above us, his authority and dominion over us, are implied in the character of a king; his boundless affection and goodness, and tender care for us, under that of a father. The former convicts us of most insolent rebellion, the latter of the basest and most unnatural ingratitude. And how hardened is that face which betrays not the utmost confusion for disobedience toward such relations even among men! But what are the best of fathers, what the mightiest of kings upon earth, compared to our most gracious, most glorious one in heaven? And consequently, what comparison can there be between our offences committed against God, and those by which any one man can have provoked any other man? How near to a level must they needs stand who are both taken out of the same clay, both framed by the same potter, both cast in the same mould, both servants in the same family, though the rank and post they both hold in it be not exactly alike! How small and inconsiderable is any difference in the power of a few circumstances to make, where all the essential parts and privileges are perfectly alike! Weigh then this disproportion well, and then tell me, O man, with what face thou canst go to extremities with one so much thy equal, when thy own conscience accuses thee daily, and flies for pardon to one in every respect infinitely thy superior? But if this consideration cannot disarm thy passion, the next, I persuade myself, will not fail to put it quite out of countenance: which is,

2. Secondly, the quality of the debt itself; figured by sums so distant as that of our offences against God amounting to *ten thousand talents*; those of our brethren against us rising no higher than a *hundred pence*. They who take the pains to compute these two sums will, I think, find the disproportion between them to be much about six hundred thousand to one. Nor may we imagine the comparison to stand good only in the case of very notorious and profligate sinners on the one hand, and of the slightest injuries on the other: but every man, even the most circumspect, owes his *ten thousand talents* to God; and no man, even the most unworthily treated, hath more than a *hundred pence* to demand of his brother. For how poor is the damage sustained by one or a few instances of enmity or injustice done to us, if set against the various, the frequent, the continual provocations

daily and hourly given by us to God ! How small is the greatest clemency of the meekest and best-natured man alive, if compared to those boundless overflowings of mercy extended by him to sorrowful and returning sinners ! But especially, how unworthy is any sinner of that mercy, who refuses to forgive a debt so trivial, that if himself be not forgiven six hundred thousand times as much he must be ruined and undone for ever ; nay, who is already forewarned that forgiven he cannot be that vastly great, without remitting freely this very small demand ! To all which we have yet a

3. Third difference to add, with regard to the ability of these several debtors ; since what we have offended God in, we are in no condition to make satisfaction for ; but for all that men have done amiss to us, we may receive large and sufficient reparation. This remark likewise the parable suggests by affirming that *the servant had not wherewithal to pay his lord* *. His asking *patience* therefore, and promising full payment, was but the artifice of common debtors, who, to gain time and quiet, make no scruple to engage for things they are altogether unable to make good. But now, by no such intimation being left us of the fellow-servant, we may reasonably presume that his *hundred pence* might and would have been easily compassed with a little forbearing and gentle usage *.

Thus it is likewise in the application. For many offences, the very persons offending may make us good amends ; many, the laws will right us in ; and those in which neither of these ways can help us to restitution, God hath a thousand methods in reserve, and will not fail to do us justice for. An estate wrested out of our hands by oppression or fraud may be drawn back again with advantage ; a malicious slander may blow over, and be so effectually confuted as even to establish and raise our reputation : but if neither of these happen, still such are only temporal and transitory losses. Men may impoverish us here, but they cannot take from us that treasure in heaven upon which alone our hearts ought to be fixed. They may speak and think amiss of us ; but, blessed be God, it is not theirs but his sentence that we are to stand and fall by ; and his judgment we are sure will be according to truth and righteousness. Nay, put the last and worst effect of malice, that it kill our body ; yet can it not touch our soul, nor finally destroy that very body, nor rob us of one jewel in that crown, which when outrage and envy help to procure, they become even a kindness and advantage to us. And thus we know it is that *all things* are sure to *work together for good to them that love God* † : that the more grievous such men's sufferings, the more injurious, the more meekly endured, the more charitably passed over they have been, by so much the brighter, the more massive, is that eternal glory they work out.

But though men may sometimes, and God can and will always make us amends, yet we are not in a capacity of making him any ; all the payment he can receive for this vast debt on our part is of his own. For we have nothing, and we are nothing ; and therefore, knowing that we had not to pay, this gracious Lord hath provided

* Matt. xviii. 25.

† Ver. 28, 29, 30.

† Rom. viii. 20.

himself a Lamb of more value than millions of millions of us; a Lamb whose blood he therefore accepts in full satisfaction for the debts and trespasses of a whole world of sinners.

So strongly is this duty bound upon us by a comparison of the two cases, as well as by the arguments insisted on before. To men dispassionate and unprejudiced, these reasons will be sufficient; to them that are not, nothing will be so. I conclude my discourse therefore with an excellent passage out of the son of Sirach⁹, than which I can think of none more pertinent to the Gospel for this day: *He that re-vengeeth shall find vengeance from the Lord, and he will surely keep his sins in remembrance. Forgive thy neighbour the hurt that he hath done unto thee, so shall thy sins also be forgiven when thou prayest. One man beareth hatred against another, and doth he seek pardon from the Lord? He sheweth no mercy to a man, which is like himself: and doth he ask forgiveness of his own sins? If he that is but flesh nourish hatred, who will entreat for pardon of his sins?...Remember the commandments, and bear no malice to thy neighbour: remember the covenant of the Highest, and wink at ignorance.*

THE THREE AND TWENTIETH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY.

THE COLLECT.

O God, our refuge and strength, who art the author of all godliness; Be ready, we beseech thee, to hear the devout prayers of thy Church; and grant that those things which we ask faithfully we may obtain effectually; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen^a.

THE EPISTLE. Phil. iii. 17.

17 *Brethren, be followers together of me, and mark them which walk so as ye have us for an ensample.* 17. Let your behaviour (with regard to the matter in controversy about the

Jewish law, and in all other points) be conformable to mine, and to theirs who act as I do.

18 *(For many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ:* 18. And be not seduced by them, who (with great sorrow I speak it) are by their zeal for the law ene-

mies to Christ crucified, partly by refusing to suffer for his sake, and partly by advancing the legal rites, and so not ascribing their salvation to his death alone, but insisting upon the observance of those as necessary to it.

⁹ Eccles. xxviii. 1, &c.

^a John xv. 1—5; Mark xi. 24.

19 *Whose end is destruction, whose God is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame, who mind earthly things.*) 19. Such men God will destroy; they will perish in their sins: they devote themselves wholly to luxury and lust, take a pride in the practices that are really a reproach to them, and set their hearts upon the profits and pleasures of this world only.

20 *For our conversation is in heaven; from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ:* 20, 21. But good Christians look farther. They consider that they are denizens of heaven, that their main interest lies there, and therefore live as men whose minds are already there.

21 *Who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body, according to the working whereby he is able even to subdue all things unto himself.* And reason good, since their Saviour and head, who is already there, is assuredly expected by them to come and to transform these frail and mortal bodies to the likeness of his own glorified body. An astonishing change indeed, but such as ought not to exceed our belief; when we consider that the person undertaking for it is omnipotent; and consequently able to effect this or any other thing that he sees fit.

COMMENT.

By propounding his own practice to these Philippians^b as a pattern for their imitation, the apostle hath at once intimated to us the duty, both of all who are intrusted with the ministry of the gospel, to set, and of all who live under their ministry, to follow, such examples as may express and adorn the Christian religion. The mighty usefulness and happy influence whereof should here have been illustrated as inducements so to do, had not a former occasion led me (though briefly yet I hope sufficiently^c) to represent both the beauty and the force of such motives to piety and virtue.

The great necessity of such examples, and of a careful conformity to them, is in the next place urged from the multitudes of those who brought a scandal upon and acted manifestly against the interests of the Christian religion. This teaches men to depend upon the death of Jesus as the only sufficient and meritorious cause of salvation, and prescribes faith in him as the means and condition of attaining the benefits purchased by that death. But several who had embraced the gospel retained an intemperate and unseasonable zeal for the Mosaic institution, and holding the observance of those rites still necessary, represented the death of Christ as a partial and imperfect cause of salvation. This was a derogation which, from whatever principle it proceeded, might very justly denominate the asserters of it *enemies to the cross of Christ*. But it had this yet higher aggravation of being a timeserving principle, taken up for ease and convenience; to procure favour with the Jews, and prevent any persecutions from that quarter. Nor only so, but the advancers of it were as averse to any mortification of their corrupt appetites as they could be to bodily

^b Ver. 17.^c Epistle for the third Sunday in Lent. Vol. i. p. 485.

sufferings for the truth; they would neither die for it nor live up to it: profit and pleasure, flesh and sense, had the whole of their thoughts and affections. And this was a temper and conversation so contrary to that purity and abstractedness from the world, and seeking the whole of their happiness in a future state, to which both the example and the doctrine of our blessed Saviour oblige all his disciples; that they might well be called enemies to Christ who refuse thus to *follow him*; and to that *cross*, which, in either of the senses just now mentioned, they would not be prevailed upon to *take up and follow him*^d.

The circumstances of religion are indeed very different now from what they were then. But can it be said that the lives of its professors are so? Do not multitudes of them who call themselves Christians betray the like sensual and worldly mind in the present age? Do they not employ the chief of their care in making provision for all the softnesses of luxury and lust, and by a most dissolute and even filthy conversation make their *belly their god, and glory in their shame*? Do they not lay out their love and their desires, their time and their pains, in the advantages and delights of this present mortal state, and by a wretched negligence and stupidity set up their rest and place their happiness on this side the grave, without any signs of regard to those hopes and promises which teach them to expect and seek it in a future and distant state; and thus, in the strictest sense of the apostle's words, *mind earthly things*, while in truth they mind no other but these? If then that preposterous and absurd behaviour drew tears from St. Paul, how can we see and not most heartily bewail the scandal brought upon the best of doctrines; the monstrous inconsistency between the disposition of such believers and the true spirit of that gospel pretended to be made the rule of their faith and manners; and the unspeakable danger and misery of those infinite souls *whose end must be destruction*, in despite of all the methods of grace designed to save them from it? This is an occasion that calls for our compassion more than any sufferings in person or in fortune, which extend to this life only. And such, with regard to our own preservation, ought to engage our care not to be led away by the examples of those many who live in contradiction to, but to frame our temper and behaviour upon the model of those few and better men who have rightly considered the obligations they are under, and the privileges they are entitled to, and demean themselves accordingly. And this is the importance of the words next following—*for our conversation is in heaven*.

The word which here is rendered *conversation* signifies *citizenship*, and alludes to a practice frequent with the Romans in particular; whereby not only private persons but whole cities and provinces were admitted to certain rites and immunities peculiar to that commonwealth and constitution; though they were neither born in nor inhabitants of the city of Rome. These were sometimes bestowed freely as a mark of friendship and favour, sometimes purchased at a considerable price, sometimes inherited by descent. But which way soever

conveyed, the possession of them was esteemed a very valuable advantage. That privilege St. Paul alleges in bar to his being scourged, and when the captain replied that himself had *purchased this freedom with a great sum*, answers, that he, as a native of Tarsus, was *free-born*.*

But then as this freedom conferred some privileges, so did it likewise introduce some engagements of subjection to and compliance with the laws and customs of that commonwealth whereof the persons were free. All which was perfectly well understood by the inhabitants of Philippi, which was itself a colony of Rome, though situate in Macedonia; and where the main accusation brought against the apostles was, that they *taught customs not lawful for the citizens of that place to receive, neither to observe*, upon the account of their *being Romans*†. An argument so popular, from the general apprehension of forfeiting that privilege by admitting any principles contrary to the terms upon which it was held; that we find the people of all conditions immediately taking fire, and discharging their fury upon the supposed instruments of so great a damage and danger to their community. And again, when the indignities suffered upon this account were complained of by St. Paul as an infringement of that right which he had equal claim to as a denizen of Rome‡, we find the magistrates themselves making a submission for the extremes they had been carried into by an unlawful breach of this privilege in one respect from too hasty a zeal to assert the obligations of it in another.

From hence the propriety of this expression to the Philippians in particular is very obvious and evident; and so is the application of it to Christians in general. We all, like them, belong to a city, at distance from which it is our lot at present to dwell. But still we are incorporated there, and by virtue of that incorporation lay claim to several valuable rights, which otherwise in no degree belong to us. This is our *continuing city, a city that hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God*. And all our hopes of a blessed immortality depend upon our being members of it. How highly thou ought we to esteem, how thankful ought we to shew ourselves for the benefits which this relation and capacity entitles us to! How ought our eyes, our souls, our every faculty, be fixed upon them! How continually our thoughts, our strength, our time, be employed in the pursuit of them! How very vigilant and careful should we be not to dishonour our character, or be guilty of any thing that may forfeit those rights! A character which they have quite forgot who make any thing short of heaven the end of their actions and the substance of their happiness. A forfeiture which they certainly incur who live by sense, and to the gratification of those corrupt appetites which are allowed no place there. For the laws and manners of that heavenly city are in force upon us already. And though we cannot in all points live as the blessed inhabitants there do, till we come to live where they do; yet we are bound to aspire after as great a resemblance to their purity as our present condition will admit; and by living here like them must be made meet hereafter to live with them. As therefore they are happy

* Acts xxii. 25, 27, 28.

† Acts xvi. 21, 22, 23.

‡ Ver. 37, 38, 39.

beyond all imagination in the fruition of and nearer approach to God, so should we by devout prayers and pious meditations delightfully converse with Him, contemplate the glory of his majesty, the beauties of his works, the wisdom of his providence, the wonders of his mercy and goodness, and especially that noblest instance and illustration of it, the redemption of lost mankind by the death of his dear Son. As they are set above the vanities and changes of this world by the present enjoyment of a bliss unspeakable and eternal, so should the prospect of that bliss raise our hearts above the present world, inspire a generous disdain of all the unsincere pleasures and short uncertain advantages here below, lighten all our afflictions, moderate all our passions, and reconcile to us the apprehensions and approaches of that dissolution which in death lays the seeds of an endless life. As they are all united in the most perfect agreement and tenderest love; so should we study unity and concord, in opinion and judgment; as much as may be, in charity and peace, mutual condescensions, and kind forbearances where the former cannot be. As they are freed from sin, and shine in uninterrupted holiness; so should we consider ourselves as persons no longer under the power of a carnal principle, but animated by the same spirit to a rational and divine life; a life of temperance and chastity, of severe virtue and exemplary piety; of activity and unwearied industry in doing good, and of such habitual mortification of those affections which move us to evil, that as with the blessed above they are not, so they shall now be with us as though they were not. These are some of the manners and customs of that glorious city above necessary to be received and observed by us as members of that best and most beneficial society. And thus only can we, in the vulgar and moral sense of the word, make proof, thus only, in the political and metaphorical sense of the word, reap the profit, of *our conversation being in heaven*.

It is true, we carry something about with us which will give great interruption to the best men in their endeavours thus to spiritualize their conversation, and a preposterous fondness for which hinders most men from endeavouring it at all. Were we, like those blessed we are called upon to imitate, disburdened of this load of flesh, such conversation were easy. But as it is, to have our necessities in one place, and our thoughts in another, some think a command neither reasonable nor practicable. I have in the course of this work had occasion more than once to detect the fallacy of this objection, by shewing that all the needful cares of the present life are very consistent with all that pursuit of one to come which the Christian religion requires. But that which is most proper to be observed on this occasion is the apostle's choosing to make that very *body*, which serves for a pretence to *mind earthly things*, an argument for *our conversation being in heaven*. For so he does in both senses of that word by that following clause—*from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ: who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body, according to the working whereby he is able even to subdue all things unto himself*^h.

If the body were to subsist in this state only, there might be some excuse for taking such courses as tend to the gratifying an essential part of our nature, and making the most of its short continuance upon earth. But in regard this also is a citizen of heaven, reason good that it also should submit to the laws of that place where it is to expect the completion of its happiness. We are indeed acquainted that *flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, neither doth corruption inherit incorruption*ⁱ. And therefore St. Paul takes care to instruct us what methods will be used to qualify it for so blessed an inheritance. He calls it with regard to its present condition our *vile body*, and represents it as in a state of humiliation and dishonour upon account of the frailties and necessities, the afflictions and sorrows, the sicknesses and pains, the decay and death to which it is now liable. But all these he declares shall be effectually removed, and such a change wrought upon it, as, though it surpass our comprehension, ought not to exceed our belief. For the Person effecting it is of power uncontrollable; and that he not only can but will effect it, we have all the reason in the world to assure ourselves from that instance and exemplification of this power already exhibited in his own human body. There is not any natural infirmity we now labour under with which the Son of God, when condescending to take our nature upon him, did not burden himself. And as the sufferings he then submitted to are placed to the account of human nature in general, so is the exaltation and immortality of his body now in heaven a proof and pledge of bliss and incorruption, which shall commence at the resurrection of the bodies of the faithful in general. This is the importance of our apostle's argument, and a very proper and forcible one it is for the purposes intended to be promoted by it.

For the consequences of this doctrine thoroughly assented to are evidently such as follow :

1. That nothing can be more foolish and absurd than by idleness and effeminacy, luxury and lewdness, to make (as the apostle emphatically expresses it) *our belly our god*. Because this is so far from contributing to the happiness of the body, that it only gratifies those appetites and corruptions, and adds to the drags and dross from whence even this material and gross part of us must be refined and purified, in order to a possibility of being happy. It only makes more work for our great change by immersing us deeper in flesh and sense : whereas the man that considers those desires as marks of his present vileness, and the total abolition of them as the glory and perfection of his nature, does, by resisting and subduing these, in some degree anticipate his great change, and take off from the most reproachful part of his present humiliation by *possessing his vessel in sanctification and honour*^k.

2. As the belief and consideration of this mighty change would be of good service to us against that part of our present corruption which we may prevent, so would they prove an excellent support against that part which we cannot prevent. Wants and afflictions,

ⁱ 1 Cor. xv. 50.

^k 1 Thess. iv. 4.

diseases and languishings, sorrow and decay, are encumbrances upon mortality from which the brightest virtue and most heavenly dispositions are not exempted. But the good, even when they suffer them, can find abundant reason for not being dejected under them. Because they can see to the end of all these hardships, and fortify themselves with the prospect of that impassible state which shall shortly set them quite out of the reach of those griefs, that may wear and waste, but cannot destroy the body they fall upon. They know the time cannot be long of being tossed on the billows of this tempestuous sea; for the country to which they are making is in view. A country so delightful, that, when put safe on shore, the waves and storms they have gone through shall either be forgotten or remembered with pleasure. And the knowledge of this happy revolution in their fortunes is no less an antidote against than the actual enjoyment shall be a recompense for their present sufferings. For we wonderfully mistake the matter if we suppose the same calamities equally grievous to all men. The sense of these is unquestionably more or less afflicting as they find a man's mind more or less armed to encounter them; and every impression is proportionably tender as it wounds us in the part most sensible, and threatens the destruction of that wherein we esteem our happiness to consist. From whence it follows unavoidably, that *to mind earthly things*, in St. Paul's meaning, is to multiply sorrow to ourselves by giving afflictions a power of making us miserable. But that to have *our conversation in heaven* goes a great way towards disarming them, and consults our present ease as well as our future happiness. For while we look upon heaven as our home and place of rest, the inconveniences upon our journey are easily taken up with; and we learn to be content in our travels with the want of those accommodations, of which there is sure and vast plenty to welcome our arrival at our fixed habitation.

3. Once more: this change should be seriously attended to, because it is the best mitigation of the concern so apt to overwhelm us, upon the account either of our own death or theirs who are very dear to us. The alteration made by sad disasters when that death is violent, or by pining sickness when it is leisurely and lingering, do not reduce the body at its lowest and worst estate in any comparison so far beneath its gayest bloom and vigour, as the most perfect beauty upon earth comes short of the meanest of those *stars which yet differ from each other in glory*¹. And therefore we ought to be content with what even the dead are now, in consideration of what they one day shall be. Which though we do not yet know distinctly and in every respect, yet we do or may know that it shall be as far above the present as *incorruption* is above *corruption*, *glory* above *dishonour*, *power* above *weakness*, and the *image of the heavenly* above that of the *earthly Adam*^m. This justifies our solemn thanks to God for *delivering* our brethren *out of the miseries of this sinful world*, because of that joy and *felicity* which their souls enter upon as soon as *delivered from the burden of the flesh*; and that *perfect consummation of bliss and glory* which awaits *body and soul both*, when God shall have *accomplished the*

¹ 1 Cor. xv. 41.

^m Ver. 42—49.

number of his electⁿ. This, lastly, proves the decency and significance of that pious care and respect to these bodies which so early and so remarkably distinguished Christians from the rest of the world : who laid them up in the earth whole, to testify their opinion that they were not swallowed up by the grave as a prey, but deposited there as a trust. A trust which will surely be demanded back again, and whereof a punctual restitution is expected. For so our admirable Liturgy hath taught us, in the Office of Interment, to commit these bodies to the ground in sure and certain hope of the resurrection to eternal life, through our Lord Jesus Christ : who (as this portion of Scripture hath assured us) shall change our vile body, this earth and ashes and dust, that it may be like unto his glorious body, according to the mighty working, whereby he is able to subdue all things to himself. To whom therefore, with the Father and the Holy Ghost, be all honour and praise and thanksgiving henceforth for evermore. Amen.

THE THREE AND TWENTIETH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY.

THE GOSPEL. St. Matt. xxii. 15.

15 *Then went the Pharisees, and took counsel how they might entangle him in his talk.*

16 *And they sent out unto him their disciples with the Herodians, saying, Master, we know that thou art true, and teachest the way of God in truth, neither carest thou for any man : for thou regardest not the person of men.*

17 *Tell us therefore, What thinkest thou ? Is it lawful to give tribute unto Caesar, or not ?*

18 *But Jesus perceived their wickedness, and said, Why tempt ye me, ye hypocrites ?*

19 *Show me the tribute money. And they brought unto him a penny.*

20 *And he saith unto them, Whose is this image and superscription ?*

21 *They say unto him, Caesar's. Then saith he unto them, Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's ; and unto God the things that are God's.*

22 *When they had heard these words, they marvelled, and left him, and went their way.*

COMMENT.

THE Gospel for this day is appointed upon two other occasions in the yearly service of our church : both of them solemn festivals for commemorating signal mercies vouchsafed us in our politic and national capacity. Both consequently such as a discourse concerning the rights of civil governors must needs be more especially seasonable upon. As well then upon that account, as lest this volume should swell too far beyond its just proportion, I entreat my reader's patience, to expect what I conceive proper to be observed from hence in the offices for the twenty-ninth of May and the eighth day of

March. The former justly celebrated with thanksgiving for an end put to the great and most detestable rebellion by the restoration of the king and royal family, and the government established in church and state; the latter, for the continuance of these blessings to us, by the happy accession of her most excellent majesty queen Anne, to (whom God grant long to sit in) the throne of these kingdoms.

THE FOUR AND TWENTIETH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY.

THE COLLECT.

O LORD, we beseech thee, absolve thy people from their offences; that through thy bountiful goodness we may all be delivered from the bands of those sins, which by our frailty we have committed. Grant this, O heavenly Father, for Jesus Christ's sake, our blessed Lord and Saviour. Amen.

THE EPISTLE. Col. i. 3.

3 *We give thanks to God and the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, praying always for you,*

4 *Since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus, and of the love which ye have to all the saints,*

and of that charity to all your fellow-Christians, which is a natural fruit and an evidence of your sincerity in that faith.

5 *For the hope which is laid up for you in heaven, whereof ye heard before in the word of the truth of the gospel;*

6 *Which is come unto you, as it is in all the world; and bringeth forth fruit, as it doth also in you, since the day ye heard of it, and knew the grace of God in truth:*

7 *As ye also learned of Epaphras our dear fellow-servant, who is for you a faithful minister of Christ;*
converted, and who hath faithfully discharged his duty in the doctrines he taught.

8 *Who also declared unto us your love in the Spirit.*

charity for which, by the grace of God inclining your hearts, ye are become so conspicuous.

9 *For this cause we also, since the day*

4. From the time that we were informed of your embracing the Christian faith, which is a natural fruit and an evidence of your sincerity in that faith.

6. This Gospel, in all the places where it is wonderfully spread, produces the like effects of love and hope in as many as have received it in its purity and truth.

7 As ye have done by the ministry of Epaphras, by whose instructions ye were

8. He it is that gave me an account of that Christian

9, 10. See 1 Phil. 9, &c.

we heard it, do not cease to pray for you, and to desire that ye might be filled with the knowledge of his will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding.

10 *That ye might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God ;*

11 *Strengthened with all might, according to his glorious power, unto all patience and longsuffering with joyfulness ;*

duty with patience and meekness, and constancy under any afflictions which ye shall be called to suffer upon that account.

12 *Giving thanks unto the Father, which hath made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light.*

given you a title by adopting you his sons, but also for that grace and holiness which are equally his gift, whereby we are qualified to receive our portion in that heavenly land of promise. (See Epistle for the seventh and eighth Sundays after Trinity.)

See Comment on Epistle for the twenty-second Sunday, and Epistle for Sunday the eighteenth.

11. That by the power of his assisting grace ye may be enabled to persevere in your

duty with patience and meekness, and constancy under any afflictions which ye shall be called to suffer upon that account.

12. Being thankful to God not only for that glorious inheritance to which he hath

given you a title by adopting you his sons, but also for that grace and holiness which are equally his gift, whereby we are qualified to receive our portion in that heavenly land of promise. (See Epistle for the seventh and eighth Sundays after Trinity.)

See Epistle for the seventh and eighth Sundays after Trinity.)

COMMENT.

THE reader will easily discern by this paraphrase that the most material passages in the Scripture now at hand have been already considered. And being directed by the references upon it where to refresh his memory concerning them, may soon convince himself how little occasion there is for detaining him with any farther enlargement at this time.

THE FOUR AND TWENTIETH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY.

THE GOSPEL. St. Matt. ix. 18.

18 *While Jesus spake these things unto John's disciples, behold, there came a * certain ruler, and worshipped him, saying, My daughter is even now dead : but come and lay thy hand upon her, and she shall live.*

he left at the point of death, and feared at this time she might be dead. (Compare Mark v. 22, 23 ; Luke viii. 41, 42.) But though matters were brought to that desperate pass, yet he doubted not but if Jesus would come and lay his hands on her, he had power to recover her, or even to restore her to life.

19 *And Jesus arose, and followed him, and so did his disciples.*

he was going with his disciples, and a great throng of people,

18. * A ruler of the synagogue, whose name was Jairus, addressed to him in most reverent and humble manner, telling him that he had one only daughter, whom

he left at the point of death, and feared at this time she might be dead. (Compare Mark v. 22, 23 ; Luke viii. 41, 42.) But though matters were brought to that desperate pass, yet he doubted not but if Jesus would come and lay his hands on her, he had power to recover her, or even to restore her to life.

19. To this request our Lord condescended ; and as

20, 21. A woman in the

20, 21. A woman in the

diseased with an issue of blood twelve years, came behind him, and touched the hem of his garment :

21 *For she said within herself, If I may but touch his garment, I shall be whole.*

effect, for her disease rather grew upon her, Mark v. 24, 25, 26. Luke viii. 42, 43,) this woman hearing of Jesus, and sensible that her distemper was a legal uncleanness, came by stealth behind him and touched that fringe of his garment that God had commanded the Jews to wear for a distinction; (see Numb. xv. Deut. xxii.) being fully persuaded that the touch of any thing about him was sufficient to heal her (Mark v. 29): and so it proved immediately.

22 *But Jesus turned him about, and when he saw her, he said, Daughter, be of good comfort; thy faith hath made thee whole. And the woman was made whole from that hour.*

question in the midst of so great a crowd: but he still looked about for this person, who, finding that what she had done could not be concealed, and feeling the powerful effect of it, came in great fear, and related both the fact and the success of it. Whereupon Jesus encouraged her, and at once owned and confirmed her cure.

23 *And when Jesus came into the ruler's house, and saw the minstrels and the people making a noise,*

ruler's house that his daughter was now actually dead, and therefore it was to no purpose to give Jesus the trouble of coming. All which notwithstanding, Jesus bade the ruler fear nothing, but still to retain the same vigorous faith he came to him with at first (Mark v. 35, 36. Luke viii. 49, 50). When he came to the house he suffered none to stay with him where the body lay but Peter, James, and John, and the parents of the child. And then it appeared plainly that she was dead by the solemn lamentations and the pomp of mourners usual upon such occasions.

24 *He said unto them, Give place: for the maid is not dead, but sleepeth. And they laughed him to scorn.*

for the person now dead should not (as they supposed she would) continue so, but be awakened to life presently as one out of sleep. Which they who knew her to be dead thought a very ridiculous saying, and flouted at Jesus accordingly. Mark v. 38, 39, 40; Luke viii. 52, 53.

25 *But when the people were put forth, he went in, and took her by the hand, and the maid arose.*

witnesses mentioned before, went in to the body, and taking the child by the hand, commanded her to arise; which she immediately did, and the soul being thus returned to its body (Luke viii. 55), he ordered meat to be given her; and charged the parents not to divulge this miracle, (Mark v. 43; Luke viii. 56.)

crowd, who had for twelve years laboured under a great weakness of nature, (and had spent all her substance upon physicians to no manner of

effect, for her disease rather grew upon her, Mark v. 24, 25, 26. Luke viii. 42, 43,) this woman hearing of Jesus, and sensible that her distemper was a legal uncleanness, came by stealth behind him and touched that fringe of his garment that God had commanded the Jews to wear for a distinction; (see Numb. xv. Deut. xxii.) being fully persuaded that the touch of any thing about him was sufficient to heal her (Mark v. 29): and so it proved immediately.

22. Jesus thereupon, knowing virtue to be gone out of him, (Mark v. 30,) inquired who touched him. Which his disciples thought a strange

question in the midst of so great a crowd: but he still looked about for this person, who, finding that what she had done could not be concealed, and feeling the powerful effect of it, came in great fear, and related both the fact and the success of it. Whereupon Jesus encouraged her, and at once owned and confirmed her cure.

23. During the delay occasioned by this miracle, a message came from the

ruler's house that his daughter was now actually dead, and therefore it was to no purpose to give Jesus the trouble of coming. All which notwithstanding, Jesus bade the ruler fear nothing, but still to retain the same vigorous faith he came to him with at first (Mark v. 35, 36. Luke viii. 49, 50). When he came to the house he suffered none to stay with him where the body lay but Peter, James, and John, and the parents of the child. And then it appeared plainly that she was dead by the solemn lamentations and the pomp of mourners usual upon such occasions.

24. To whom Jesus said, that there was no need of these funeral ceremonies;

for the person now dead should not (as they supposed she would) continue so, but be awakened to life presently as one out of sleep. Which they who knew her to be dead thought a very ridiculous saying, and flouted at Jesus accordingly. Mark v. 38, 39, 40; Luke viii. 52, 53.

25. But Jesus (as was said) admitting none to be present, except those few

witnesses mentioned before, went in to the body, and taking the child by the hand, commanded her to arise; which she immediately did, and the soul being thus returned to its body (Luke viii. 55), he ordered meat to be given her; and charged the parents not to divulge this miracle, (Mark v. 43; Luke viii. 56.)

26 *And the fame hereof went abroad into all that land.* 26. But notwithstanding that injunction of secrecy, it was quickly noised abroad, and gained him great reputation in all that country.

COMMENT.

THE Gospel for this day consists of two miracles, the one (if I may be allowed so to distinguish) principally designed, the other, as it were, incidental only. In the former we have a tender father applying in behalf of one only daughter lying at the last gasp; yet so, that he seems to have judged it possible for our Lord to have arrived at the patient time enough to prevent her death, had he not permitted himself to be detained by the cure of the bloody issue, and the expostulations that followed thereupon; as he manifestly and in truth most wisely did. For though every moment was precious, and the least delay seemingly cruel to a sorrowful and impatient father; yet was even this delay for his improvement and benefit. So sudden a recovery of an inveterate distemper, the obstinacy whereof had baffled all the skill and medicines of man, gave a demonstration of our Saviour's power so full of wonder, that the sight and experience of it might reasonably confirm this ruler in a belief that nothing could be too difficult for the person effecting it. So provident is God in all his dispensations; so gracious even in withholding his mercies and supplies for a season; that the very delays we suffer in temporal affairs are for our advantage. They do not only contribute to our improvement in another kind, but oftentimes make way for a more surprising and bountiful grant in the same kind. And provided we make the right use of them, wait God's good leisure with patience, consider his methods with prudence, and trust in his power and goodness with perseverance, these will not fail in the end to render us both happier and better men.

This is an argument which I have lately had occasion to consider^o, upon our Lord's restoring to life the widow's son of Nain. And after having shewn how agreeable such a method of proceeding is to the end of afflictions in general; and how reasonable a vindication of God's honour, when manifesting our entire dependance upon him by suffering our affairs to be driven to extremities past all the power of human remedies and helps; I then reserved another consideration, equally applicable to that case and this before us, to which I now proceed.

Now the point I mean is the exceeding goodness of Almighty God in delivering his servants from their sufferings and fears, when reduced to the most deplorable, and, in all outward appearance, desperate circumstances. While that widow's son and this ruler's daughter were yet alive, though under the most dangerous symptoms, there was still room for hope and comfort. Because we know very well that God (as one of our Offices expresses it) can *even yet raise men up, and grant them a longer continuance among us, when the time of their dissolution in all appearance draweth nigh* P. But when that time was

^o See Gospel for the sixteenth Sunday after Trinity.

^p Visitation of the Sick.

actually come, and all natural possibilities were taken away, our Lord did not even then think it absurd to allay an affectionate father's grief by telling him that his child should be restored to him again. This was what he alone could promise; what upon his authority alone could reasonably be expected; and that, which all but this believing parent thought it most extravagant and ridiculous to entertain the least thought or wish of, was yet effectually done for him.

Nor were such events peculiar to these occasions; but the like are vouchsafed to many good people in the day of their distress. We are not now indeed to look that God will bring back to us from the dead our friends and relations when we have parted with them. Those were instances of almighty power which had set seasons proper for exerting it. They do not belong to all generations equally, but were confined to an age of miracles long ago expired. God hath given us no ground to trust now to any but ordinary means of relief. But yet, when human and ordinary means are so ranged and brought together, so directed and surprisingly overruled, that no man could reasonably have imagined such causes should ever have met, such favourable occasions should ever have been offered, such happy uses should ever have been made, such vast advantages should ever have been drawn out of them; if this be not a miracle, it is something approaching very near to it; and forces us to break out into the Psalmist's acknowledgment—*This is the Lord's doing, and deservedly marvellous in our eyes*^c. *When he lifts the simple out of the dust, and the poor out of the mire*^d; and sets him upon a level with nobles, *even with the princes of his people*; *when our father and mother forsake us*, either because they are unnatural and will not, or unfortunate and cannot sustain us, and the *Lord taketh us up*^e; when a spiteful enemy, past our power to resist, seeks terms of accommodation, and becomes our best friend and benefactor; when a man's disasters or extravagancies have reduced him to poverty and misery, and his wants prove a whet to his industry, and an occasion of promoting him higher than ever; when friends are raised up to us whom we never knew, and advances made in our fortunes by those from whom we had no manner of expectation; when God defeats our most probable hopes of success, disappoints our desires and endeavours, but makes those disappointments instrumental to the same or much greater happiness: is not this to bring light out of darkness and life out of death? And yet these are effects of Providence frequently to be found in the world. They are such as when matters come to be closely considered, and events traced up to their spring and first head, scarce any man can want experience of either in his own affairs or some of his acquaintance. For I am very apt to believe that there are but few in comparison whose fortunes have passed through any considerable change, but the thing which ministered the first occasion, and made the first step toward it, will, upon examination, appear somewhat so small and trivial in itself, that no such effects could rationally have been proposed from it; or somewhat so odd and unexpected, that no human prudence could have projected or foreseen it.

^c Psalm cxviii. 13.^d cxii. 7, 8.^e cxvii. 10.

Since then the beginnings of our most remarkable and important events are oftentimes so small, and yet their consequences so full of wonder; this consideration ought to inspire us with confidence in God, and a holy hope in his merciful providence; not to be overthrown by even the most distressed, the most deplorable condition that can possibly overtake us. He who conveyed unseen supplies into a small cruise of oil for the sustenance of a poor hospitable widow^f; he, who changed the ravens' nature upon an extraordinary emergence, and made those creatures who barbarously neglect their own young bring constant refreshments of bread and flesh to his prophet, can never want arts, to us unknown, for relieving the miseries and ministering to the necessities of his children. The most effectual obstruction to any comforts of this kind is a distrust of his power and goodness. An eminent instance whereof the Scripture hath given us in the unbelieving lord of Samaria; who, questioning whether God was able to convert an extreme famine into a plenty so sudden as Elisha had foretold^g, was the only person not suffered to taste and to rejoice in the accomplishment of that amazing prophecy.

But we who have learned Christ ought to have quite other notions of the Divine Providence. We are allowed, nay, commanded to assure ourselves, that pious men shall want no manner of thing that is good^h. That if deliverance and prosperity be really good for them, God does not want bowels and inclination to give it. And that give it, under any circumstances whatsoever, he can, if he see fit; for *we know whom we have believed*, even him, *who is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we can ask or think*ⁱ.

I have now done with the particular circumstances of this miracle, and the inferences proper to be collected from the historical part of it. But there is under that a spiritual and mystical meaning couched, which, methinks, calls for a little of our attention. For the ruler's dead daughter here is the very image of what we all once were, and of what too many still continue to be—persons *dead in trespasses and sins*^k; forsaken of a life, which if not restored in time, better were it for such never to have been born or lived at all. And this too is a life that cannot be recovered by any operation less powerful than that of the almighty Son of God. Only herein we must observe some difference; for in regaining that spiritual life, the patient is not so absolutely passive as this young maiden was. Something must be done on man's part toward it, and without such endeavours nothing will be done to any good purpose. This happy change is made in the sanctifications of baptism upon as many as are *born anew of water and of the Spirit*^l. The care of our relations and the charity of the church do, in compassion to infants of Christian parents, supply the place and perform the kind offices of the father here before us; the one by praying for and bringing, the other by admitting such to the benefits of *that fountain opened for sin and for uncleanness*^m. Thus are the stains of our original corruption washed away. But when we come to be again involved in guilt through our own actual

^f 1 Kings xvii.^g 2 Kings vii.^h Psalm lxxxiv. 11.ⁱ Eph. iii. 20.^k Eph. ii. 1.^l John iii. 5.^m Zech. xiii. 1.

transgressions, then sad remorse, godly contrition, hearty repentance and earnest supplications for mercy and pardon, are our duty. In these we shall find the blessed Jesus ready (as Jairus did) to hear and help. And powerful assistances of his grace will succour and rescue us in our extremity, provided we seek it importunately and use it diligently. When thus prepared for that reviving word—*I say unto thee, Arise*; we are to rouse ourselves without delay, to shake off all our old corruptions, to testify our return to life by *walking with this damsel*^a; that is, by *proceeding daily in all virtue and godliness of living*, and taking effectual care that our actions for the future be of a new and better kind. Then will our spiritual father and mother—God and the Church—receive us with joy, and minister most wholesome sustenance to this new life^o; even that *flesh which is meat indeed, and that blood which is drink indeed*ⁿ. This we are to be very confident our blessed Saviour will not refuse to do, even for the blackest and most miserable offenders, if they sincerely turn to him: in regard he both died and rose again for this intent, that he might raise us from the death of sin unto the life of righteousness in this world, and to a life of bliss and glory everlasting in the world to come. A resurrection of which the miracle in this day's Gospel is in some sort both a figure and a pledge. And therefore at the same time that our Church brings the one to our remembrance, she very fitly makes the other the matter of our special petition; *beseeching God, in her Collect, to absolve his people from their offences, that through his bountiful goodness we may all be delivered from the bands of those sins which by our frailty we have committed*. And do thou grant this, O heavenly Father, for Jesus Christ's sake, our blessed Lord and Saviour. Amen.

THE FIVE AND TWENTIETH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY.

THE COLLECT.

STIR up, we beseech thee, O Lord, the wills of thy faithful people; that they, plenteously bringing forth the fruit of good works, may of thee be plenteously rewarded; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

THE EPISTLE. Jer. xxiii. 5.

5 Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, that I will raise unto David a righteous Branch, and a King shall reign and prosper, and shall execute judgment and justice in the earth.

5, 6. The pastors I have promised to send (var. 2, 3, 4) shall be then most eminently feeders of the flock; when the great Shepherd of

^a Mark v. 42.

^o Ver. 43.

ⁿ John vi. 55.

6 *In his days Judah shall be saved, and the sheep shall guide them. Israel shall dwell safely: and this is his name whereby he shall be called, THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS.* For such a one, called the Branch, I will certainly raise up of the stock of David (low as now it is) who is therefore called the Branch. He shall govern wisely, and be successful over his enemies; and enact just laws; and bring safety to his people; and be the author of righteousness to them, God and man in the same person^a.

7 *Therefore, behold, the days come, saith the Lord, that they shall no more say, The Lord liveth, which brought up the children of Israel out of the land of Egypt;* 7. The blessing of the deliverance wrought by him shall far exceed that of the Israelites from the slavery and misery of Egypt.

8 *But, The Lord liveth, which brought up and which led the seed of the house of Israel out of the north country, and from all countries whither I had driven them; and they shall dwell in their own land.* 8. So that whereas my title of distinction hitherto in use hath been that of *The Lord which brought Israel out of Egypt*; the memory of that shall be so obscured by this infinitely greater and more valuable mercy; that I shall then be distinguished in all solemn invocations by the title of the Lord who gathered all the dispersed Jews, and settled them in the possession of all the happiness promised to attend the glorious reign of the Messiah.

COMMENT.

THAT this Scripture is a prophecy of the coming of Christ, and the glorious state of God's church consequent thereupon, hath been universally agreed by Christian, and allowed by several of the most eminent Jewish interpreters. Nor indeed is it, I conceive, possible to think of any other person or event to which the characters left us here agree: while at the same time they do all conspire most evidently to point out the Messiah and his kingdom. To make this appear, it shall be my business to consider, first, the prophet's account of the person promised here; and secondly, the blessings and beneficial effects of his coming.

I.—Under the former of these heads we find the person who is the subject matter of the promise mentioned in three capacities: as *a Branch of David*, as *a King*, and as *The Lord our Righteousness*.

1. No figure is more usual than for the head of a family and the descendants from him to be represented by the root or body of a tree, and the branches growing out of that tree. And therefore God having frequently declared that the Messiah should be born of the house and lineage of David, this prophet here, and at the thirty-third chapter^b (with allusion to a tree wasted and almost past bearing, and so resembling the many calamities whereby the posterity of that prince had been reduced to such miserable circumstances as left no human appearance or hope of any future flourishing), mentions, as an act of wonderful power and mercy, that God would still raise or cause to

^a Ch. xxxiii. 15; Isaiah xl. 1; Zech. iii. 8, vi. 12.

^b Ch. xxxiii. 15.

grow up unto David a righteous Branch. And Isaiah, in like manner, and terms the most emphatical that can be, *There shall come forth a rod out of the stem of Jesse, and a Branch shall grow out of his roots*^c. The word translated *stem* does strictly signify the stump left in the earth when the body of the tree is cut away even with the ground. And the coming of Christ is hereby very elegantly described to be a mercy as full of surprise as the shooting out of such a neglected, and, in common esteem, dead trunk, up to a tree more verdant and fruitful than ever.

And what could set before us a more lively image of the time and circumstances in which every particular of these predictions received a most punctual accomplishment by the birth and coming of Christ? That he was very man, of the substance of his virgin mother, and literally the Son of David, is so expressly affirmed, so clearly made out in Scripture, and hath been already^d so fully explained, that I cannot suppose myself under any necessity at present to enlarge, either upon the truth of his human nature, or the account of his particular family and descent.

That which I rather choose to observe is, that the glory of this family had been declining ever since the death of his son Solomon, whom God has pleased to make an eminent type of Christ's exaltation, as David himself had been of his humiliation and sufferings. The revolt of ten tribes from Rehoboam was a never yet repaired dismembering of this tree; the frequent provocations of very wicked successors in that line had drawn on many judgments and public calamities, which still took more away from it; the Babylonish captivity put an end to the royal style and dignity. The exercise of power was indeed continued afterwards, and particularly prosperous under the administration of Zerubbabel. But it deserves to be remarked, that neither name nor thing remained at the time of our Saviour's birth. For though Herod had then by the favour of the Roman emperor the title of king allowed him, yet Herod was so far from being of David's lineage as not to be of either Judah's or any other tribe whatsoever; but by birth an Idumean, and of descent foreign to the whole race over which he then presided. The placing this authority in a stranger's hand did not only interrupt, but intercept all human prospect of succession in any descendants from David. And hence it is that the history of our blessed Lord's life takes special notice of his being born in the days of Herod the king^e. Thereby to put the Jews upon comparing events with predictions, and, by a just calculation of times and circumstances, to make them sensible that the stock of David was then cut down to the very root; and that when neither mark nor hope of royalty remained in any other, the proper season was come for raising from that trunk, so trodden down, the promised Branch, which should put forth and expand itself more fruitfully than ever, by being in a manner and degree of honour and power incomparably above any of his ancestors *King of the Jews*. And this leads to the

2. Second capacity wherein Christ is promised here in those words,

^c Isaiah xi. 1.

^d Gospel for Sunday after Christmas.

^e Matt. ii. 1; Luke i. 5.

A King shall reign^f: That the Messiah was all along down from the time of David foretold and expected under this character, is agreed even by the bitterest adversaries to the Christian religion. Whose main objection against Jesus being the Messiah turns upon his making a figure so very different from the pomp and grandeur which they conceive essential to that dignity, and necessary to answer those magnificent expressions in which the prophets have described the glories of his kingdom. To this argument I shall endeavour to give satisfaction by and by. Meanwhile let it be remembered, that from the time pointed to by the prediction now before us, the Jews seem to have expected no other king but him; and, as well for that reason, as to intimate their notions of the greatness and majesty attributed to him, they generally mention him with that title of eminence and distinction, *Messiah the King*. Nor is the New Testament wanting in affirming our Jesus to be such, in a manner far superior to any other. The angel at his conception applies to him the prophecies of Isaiah, Daniel, and Micah, by saying, *He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest: and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David: and he shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of his kingdom there shall be no end*. The question with which the wise men from the east came to Jerusalem upon his nativity was, *Where is he that is born King of the Jews?* For resolution whereof the oracles of the law being called together to consult, the demand made of them is, *Where Christ should be born*^h? And when they had fixed on Bethlehem for the place, those inquirers were conducted thither to Jesus by the guidance of an extraordinary star. The first confession of him made by Nathaniel runs in this form, *Rabbi, thou art the Son of God, thou art the King of Israel*ⁱ! So did the acclamations of the people attending him into the holy city, *Blessed is the King of Israel that cometh in the name of the Lord*^k. Which he was so far from rebuking at the Pharisees' request^l, as even then obscurely to acknowledge the justice and propriety of the appellation. But this he did afterward more openly, in conversation with his own disciples—*I appoint unto you a kingdom, as my Father hath appointed unto me*^m; in his confession before Pilateⁿ: but most expressly when, immediately before his ascent into heaven, he declares the universal extent of this kingdom—*All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth*^o: as St. Paul does the duration and absolute dominion of it when saying, *that he must reign till he hath put all enemies under his feet*^p. And calling him, with St. John, *the blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings and Lord of lords*^q.

3. The last thing observable in the person foretold is that *name* said to belong to him, *The Lord our Righteousness*. Which being in the original *Jehovah*, a name denoting the essence and immutability of God, and acknowledged by the Jews incommunicable to any creature, intimates to us the divinity of Christ. Concerning the personal

^f Jer. xxiii. 5.^g Luke i. 32, 33. Compare Isaiah ix. 7. Dan. vii. 14. Micah iv. 7.^h Matt. ii. 2, 4, 5, 9, 10.ⁱ John i. 49.^k John xii. 13.^l Luke xix. 39.^m John xxi. 29; xxiii. 3.ⁿ John xviii. 36, 37.^o Matt. xxviii. 18.^p 1 Cor. xv. 25.^q 1 Tim. vi. 15. Rev. xix. 16.

union whereof to the human nature, and the invaluable merit of his sufferings upon that account, whereby he expiated the sins of the whole world, and so became *our Righteousness*; as the measure of this discourse will not allow, so the consideration of those subjects heretofore may very well dispense with my farther insisting upon them now.

II. I pass therefore to my second general head, the blessings and beneficial effects of the Messiah's coming, foretold here: (1.) by his *reigning and prospering*; (2.) by his *executing judgment and justice in the earth*; (3.) by the profound safety and quiet of Judah and Israel under his government; and lastly, by these blessings so far surpassing the deliverance of that people out of Egypt, as in a manner to swallow up all remembrance of that less, in the grateful acknowledgments of this infinitely more valuable mercy. Somewhat of these in their order, and of each as briefly as may be.

1. The first, which concerns the Messiah's *reigning and prospering*, will necessarily oblige us to consider that capital objection of the Jews, who deny that our Jesus could possibly be the Messiah, because he was a man of poverty and affliction, lived meanly, and died ignominiously; and therefore (say they) is most absurdly put upon the world for that person, who is foretold in the quality of a king, the most glorious that ever was or shall be in the world.

In answer hereunto, let me just mention two observations, which have been handled more fully upon another occasion*.

First. Let it be considered that the Messiah, in order to accomplish the prophecies concerning him, was to sustain three very different characters. That of a Prophet and of a Priest, as well as that of a King. As a Prophet, he was not only to teach his people, but to undergo the common fate of prophets, in being despised, contradicted, persecuted, and bearing testimony to the truth of his doctrine by the example of his sufferings for it. As a Priest, he must sacrifice for the sins of his people, which in this case could not be otherwise done than by offering his own blood, and consequently dying in their stead. And the reasons for his dying in so ignominious a manner have been formerly set forth†. Now both these, in the course of things appointed by God, were to go before the entrance upon his kingly office; because the prophecies mention this last as a recompense for the faithful discharge of the other two‡. Accordingly the solemn investiture in his kingdom commenced from his resurrection. That proving him to be *the Son of God with power*; and the day of his ascent to the throne of his Majesty on high being that of his actual inauguration. Consequently, all arguments drawn from the meanness of his appearance upon earth are of no force against his royal character; because that meanness was exactly agreeable to the characters proper to be sustained at that time. But as the prophetic was to give way to the priestly, so was the sacrificer's to the kingly. And to urge any thing to purpose against this, it is necessary to argue from facts subsequent to that appearance upon earth. For to

* See Epistle and Gospel for Christmas Day, and the Epistle for Wednesday before Easter.

† Boyle's Lect. 1701. Sermon VIII.

‡ Tuesday before Easter.

§ Psalm cxli. Isaiah liii. Compare Heb. i. 3; ii. 10; x. 12, 13. Phil. ii. 7—11.

complain that his kingly power was not exercised at his first coming, is to misunderstand the prophecies, and confound the order of events; it is to expect a full accomplishment of predictions within a very narrow space belonging to an office still in exercise, and to which, the Scripture says, *there shall be no end*.*

Secondly, it should be observed, that it is agreeable to the custom of those times and countries in general, and to the style and manner of the prophets in particular, to abound with figurative schemes of speech; especially when subjects uncommon, sublime and spiritual, are treated of, to represent them by the most pompous and bold metaphors and descriptions, derived from such objects of sense as awaken in our minds the most lofty apprehensions we are capable of. This the Jews themselves make no difficulty to allow; and some of their greatest doctors have made it a rule for interpreting the prophets; that they are not to be literally understood by reason of those metaphorical expressions, the true intent whereof is to represent things according to our capacity by images familiar to our senses†. This appears also to be their own method of interpreting several passages of the Old Testament, acknowledged by themselves to belong to the Messiah, as descriptions of his peaceful and glorious kingdom. Particularly the seventy-second Psalm, the eleventh, thirty-fifth, sixty-fifth, and sixty-sixth of Isaiah, the fifth of Micah, the two last chapters of Zechariah, and sundry others. And indeed we are least on this occasion of any to wonder at the recourse had to such figures and flights; where the benefits spoken of are of so exalted a nature as to make that pomp of expression the effect of necessity, which would in others pass for chosen and artificial. These may be magnified above their just proportions; but no words can come up to the real dignity of those; and therefore the most magnificent descriptions borrowed from sensible objects do not adorn or exalt, but only speak of them in the most respectful manner that our poor capacities are able to bear.

The latter of these observations will bear us out in applying this passage of Jeremiah to our blessed Lord and his kingdom in a spiritual sense. For what king ever was so prosperous as this, who by the propagation of the gospel hath enlarged his dominions so wonderfully over the most distant regions of the habitable world? What conquest was ever so glorious as that which he hath gained over the errors and prejudices, the lusts and passions of wicked and mistaken men; nay, even over all the powers of darkness, sin and death and hell? Who ever executed righteousness and judgment in the earth like him? Who hath enacted laws so holy, so prudent, so beneficial, that, if duly observed, the effect of them must be such exact justice, such uninterrupted order and peace, such gentleness and good-nature and universal charity, as would make even an heaven upon earth? Thus would the true Judah, the Israel of God, dwell in profound safety, they that believe and practise his blessed doctrine. For the distinguishing of whom by these titles, alluding to God's once peculiar

* Isaiah ix. 7.

† Maim. More Nevoch. p. ii. cxxix. xlvii. Menas. Ban Israel. Qu. in Gen. xxx.

people literally so called, as the Scriptures have left us sundry examples^z; so those Jews have no reason to reproach us, who to this day do, in the very same sense, stigmatize Christians with the name of *Edomites*. Thus again is the deliverance of Israel after the flesh infinitely surpassed by the rescue of Israel after the Spirit from a tyranny and bondage with which the Egyptian deserves not so much as to be named. And the remembrance of the former is in great measure swallowed up and defaced by the abolition of those ceremonial rites and festivals; into the place whereof the two Christian sacraments, and our seasons of public thanksgiving, succeed, as commemorations and perpetual monuments of this latter and better redemption. These all are mercies of such a nature as require images borrowed from worldly prosperity and objects familiar to us, for conveying into our minds ideas of benefits remote from our bodily senses; but withal benefits of that magnitude and vast consequence, that the descriptions taken from sensible and external happiness, even when most lofty and magnificent, though the best helps our condition can admit, are yet all little enough to make us worthily conceive of them.

2. But be it granted, as indeed seems very probable from several passages in both Testaments, that this and sundry other prophecies mean temporal greatness, prosperity, and peace; and these to be enjoyed by Israel and Judah strictly so called, under the government of the Messiah. Yet is not the continuance of their dispersion and calamity any just prejudice against believing our Jesus to be the Messiah. Had the adversaries of our religion been able to produce any predictions not yet accomplished, which properly belong to his prophetic or priestly character, and such actions as were determined to his first advent, those had been formidable objections indeed. But the force of objections against his kingly character is by no means the same. Because, as hath been said, the end of his humiliation was his accession to the throne: this office he is still in the exercise of, and shall remain so to the end of the world. The glorious things foretold with regard to this have each their proper season and order, and are drawn out to a long tract of time; many of these we know are still behind; and such as the Father seems to have so entirely reserved to his own power as to have left the periods for their accomplishment very much in the dark. Meanwhile he hath abundantly signified that the distance of the time from his leaving the world was very considerable^a. He hath laid down some memorable events, which should be marks and preliminaries to the approach of the rest^b; he hath intimated some reasons for the delay of them, pointed out the obstructions to them, and warned men not to be shaken in their faith, because the expectations of this kind are not either fully answered, or in human prospect near being so^c. They are still within the term assigned them by the prophets: the days of the Messiah and the *last* days being, in the acceptation even of Jews themselves, phrases of like importance; and such as no end shall ever come to, that only excepted, when Christ shall *deliver up the kingdom*

to God, even the Father, and shall have put down all rule and all authority and power^d.

Of the events reserved for the latter end of those days, the general conversion of the Jews to the Christian faith, mentioned in the eleventh to the Romans, and the glorious state of the church antecedent to the last judgment, have deservedly been esteemed some of the principal. The account whereof, as described by the ancient prophets, and the Revelation of St. John, will fill up the characters of holiness and purity, tranquillity and splendour, any where attributed to it; though the assertors of it should not think it necessary to go into many of the notions advanced by some millennaries of these latter ages, which seem too liable to just exceptions, and foreign from those which the primitive Fathers entertained concerning it. Thus much a very learned commentator of our time and nation hath taken excellent pains to prove in a late discourse upon this subject^e.

By what hath been observed upon this head, my design is to shew that we are not left under any reasonable doubt whether our blessed Lord be the promised Messiah, though his kingly authority be not so visibly and powerfully exerted as it shall one day be: nor all those glorious effects as yet fulfilled which are implied in several predictions relating to his peaceful and victorious reign. The amazing vengeance taken on his murderers, in their city and constitution; the no less wonderful success of his gospel, propagated and preserved in despite of all its enemies; these are instances of that unlimited *power in heaven and earth* wherewith this King is invested. The enlightening Jews and Gentiles, by bringing such multitudes of the one and so many nations of the other sort to the acknowledgment of the truth, are already a partial completion of the prophecies; though there be still a nobler in reserve, when the fulness of both shall come in. He reigns now actually in the hearts of men, and subdues the most formidable of our enemies by the holiness of his laws and the mighty operations of his grace; but that dominion and conquest will be much more absolute, when the time comes for every enemy being utterly destroyed. Though therefore the whole be not, yet abundantly enough hath been already fulfilled to deliver us from suspense. And our faith may very safely acquiesce in a most steadfast assurance that what is still behind shall certainly come to pass; because no whit hath failed of any thing hitherto, expedient and seasonable to be done, as an evidence of Christ's regal authority.

Let the Scripture then at present before us be improved to the purpose our church appears to have intended it for; by confirming our faith in the first, and awakening us into effectual preparation for the second advent of our Lord. Both which are, by the yearly revolution of our holy offices, about to be again presented to our thoughts. And let us to that end give all possible diligence to be led by and work together with that grace and good Spirit of our God, which the Collect of this day so opportunely implores, for the *stirring up the wills of his faithful people, that they, plenteously bringing forth the fruit of good works, may of him be plenteously rewarded, through Jesus Christ our Lord.* Amen.

^d 1 Cor. xv. 24.

^e Dr. Whitby on the Millennium.

THE FIVE AND TWENTIETH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY.

THE GOSPEL. St. John vi. 5.

5 *When Jesus then lifted up his eyes, and saw a great company come unto him, he saith unto Philip, Whence shall we buy bread, that these may eat?*

6 *And this he said to prove him: for he himself knew what he would do.*

7 *Philip answered him, Two hundred pennyworth of bread is not sufficient for them, that every one of them may take a little.*

8 *One of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, saith unto him,*

9 *There is a lad here, which hath five barley loaves, and two small fishes: but what are they among so many?*

10 *And Jesus said, Make the men sit down. Now there was much grass in the place. So the men sat down, in number about five thousand.*

11 *And Jesus took the loaves; and when he had given thanks, he distributed to the disciples, and the disciples to them that were set down; and likewise of the fishes as much as they would.*

12 *When they were filled, he said unto his disciples, Gather up the fragments that remain, that nothing be lost.*

13 *Therefore they gathered them together, and filled twelve baskets with the fragments of the five barley loaves, which remained over and above unto them that had eaten.*

14 *Then those men, when they had seen the miracle that Jesus did, said, This is of a truth that prophet that should come into the world.*

COMMENT.

THIS scripture hath been fully treated of on the Gospel for the fourth Sunday in Lent. The reason for repeating it here seems to have been the inference which the multitudes drew from this miracle at the fourteenth verse. The general expectation of the Messiah, and of his approach at that time, was particularly intimated by giving to him the title of *He that should come*¹. So that the people, when declaring upon the sight of this miracle that Jesus was *the prophet that should come into the world*, meant that it was an unquestionable evidence of his being the Messiah. This meaning is yet more fully explained by their intentions to make him a king, under which character the Messiah was foretold and expected. And most probably this judgment of theirs was now again set before us as a fit preparation for the now returning season of Advent. As to the reasonableness of this conclusion, and how far our Saviour's miracles made proof of his Messiahship, the reader, if disposed to meditate on that point, will find it considered on the Gospels for the second Sunday after the Epiphany and the third in Advent.

¹ See Matt. xi. 3. Gospel for the third Sunday in Advent.

² John vi. 15.

A
PARAPHRASE AND COMMENT
 UPON ALL THE
EPISTLES AND GOSPELS
 USED THROUGHOUT THE YEAR.

TO THE QUEEN'S MOST SACRED MAJESTY.

MADAM,

YOUR Majesty hath already condescended most graciously to accept my poor endeavours upon the Service of our Established Church for the Sundays throughout the year.

The same excellent Church which your Majesty's piety so conspicuously governs, protects, adorns, and loves, hath wisely appointed devotions proper for the Christian Festivals. And now my labours to render these also useful and instructive humbly presume to ask your royal countenance and favour. A pardonable presumption, I hope; in regard such devotions were intended to do honour to those saints whose doctrines and virtues are your Majesty's constant rule and pattern: those saints whose memory is, as is also your Majesty's, worthy to be preserved with immortal respect: and among whom you, Madam, (with your late royal consort,) will shine yet more gloriously, when translated from your earthly to a better and more durable crown in heaven.

In the meantime (and for your people's sake may that time be long!) your Majesty continues a living incitement to the

holy joys of those other solemnities which celebrate the signal mercies of God to this particular Church and nation. For these mercies are every day growing upon us by your Majesty's most gentle and auspicious government. May all your subjects pay their thanks to God and your Majesty for them, as the offices for those occasions direct: and may *the Father of mercies* and *the God of all consolations* so sanctify and support you under the tender sense of an affliction, the weight of which all good men feel for you and with you; that every fresh trial of your Majesty's virtue may render the influence of your example more successful here, and the degrees of your happiness more exquisite hereafter.

I am, with all possible duty,

(May it please your Majesty,)

Your Majesty's most faithful,

most obedient,

and most devoted

subject and servant,

GEORGE STANHOPE.

November, 1, 1708.

ST. ANDREW'S DAY.

A short Account of St. Andrew.

ST. ANDREW was the son of Jonas a fisherman of Bethsaida^a, and (by the ancients, Epiphanius excepted, believed to be the younger) brother of St. Peter. Of his education, his discipleship to the Baptist, his first and second call to Christ, and the effect these had upon him, enough is said on the Gospel for the fifth Sunday after Trinity and that for this day. The knowledge of and coming to our Lord, mentioned in the first of St. John's Gospel^b, gained him the title of the *first-called*. And the bringing his brother Simon the first intelligence of and conducting him to the Messiah is the reason of his being styled *πέτρος πρὸ πέτρου*, or *the rock before the rock*.

His brother and he seem to have dwelt together in the same house where Peter's wife's mother lay sick^c. Though we do not read of the same admission of him to the privacies of our Lord as his brother and James and John had, yet some passages seem to intimate a more than common interest in our Lord's favour. When five thousand were to be fed by a miracle, and our Lord had made an experiment of Philip's faith, upon his answering how impracticable the refreshing so many in that place was, our Lord inquires into the quantity of their provision; of which Andrew was the person that gave the account, but withal of the vast disproportion between so little food and so many wanting to be fed^d.

Some Greeks, at our Lord's last passover, desirous to see Jesus, but not presuming to approach him without an introducer, apply to Philip; he communicates their request to Andrew, and both together prefer it to our Lord^e. It is also worth our notice that this apostle is named as the fourth who attended his Master in his retirement to the mount of Olives^f; and was present at the warnings he was pleased to give of the destruction of Jerusalem and his own last coming.

After our Lord's ascension, the part of the world assigned to St. Andrew's care was Scythia^g. He was not idlo in his passage thither; but preached in Cappadocia, Galatia, Bithynia, and by the coast of the Euxine sea, till he had penetrated into the deserts of that barbarous country. St. Jerome says^h, he preached at Sebastople, where the rivers Phasis and Apsarus run into the Euxine sea. Nazianzenⁱ says the same of Epirus. He preached also in Thrace, Macedonia, and Achaia; correcting, as St. Chrysostom expresses it^k, the wise men of Greece. At last in Patræ, a city of Achaia, Ægeas the proconsul, enraged at his undauntedly persisting to publish the doctrine of a crucified Saviour, condemned him to the death he so much extolled^l. Which was suffered on a cross, not of the usual form,

^a John i. 44.
Mark vi. 37, 38.
iii. c. 1.

^b John i. 35—40.
^c John xii. 20, 21, 22.

^d Mark i. 29.

^e Compare John vi. 5—9 with

^f Mark xiii. 3.

^g Euseb. Hist. lib.

Orat. 168.

^h Catal. Script.

ⁱ Orat. in Arrian.

^k Hom. in 12 Apost. t. 5.

^l Hieron. Catalog. Script.

but like the letter X, and since known commonly by the name of *St. Andrew's cross*. To make his death more painful and lingering, he was fastened to this, not with nails, but cords. On which, after having hung two days, all the while praising God for his martyrdom, and exhorting the spectators to the Christian faith, he is said to have expired the thirtieth day of November. Constantine afterwards brought his body to Constantinople, and interred it there with great respect. In which city also St. Andrew is reported by one of the succeeding patriarchs^m to have planted a Christian church, and to have ordained the beloved Stachys, mentioned by St. Paulⁿ, the first bishop of it.

THE COLLECT.

ALMIGHTY GOD, who didst give such grace unto thy holy Apostle Saint Andrew, that he readily obeyed the calling of thy Son Jesus Christ, and followed him without delay; Grant unto us all, that we, being called by thy holy Word, may forthwith give up ourselves obediently to fulfil thy holy commandments; through the same Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen^a.

THE EPISTLE. Rom. x. 9.

9 *If thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved.*

9. The sum of the condition required of Christians is a firm belief in Jesus, (in that main article of his resurrection particularly,) and an undaunted profession of his truth and of our dependence on him as our Master and only Saviour.

10 *For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.*

10. This is the true justifying faith, this the confession that gives a title to salvation.

11 *For the scripture saith, Whosoever believeth on him shall not be ashamed.*

12 *For there is no difference between the Jew and the Greek: for the same Lord over all is rich unto all that call upon him.*

13 *For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.*

11, 12, 13. And this condition extends to all mankind, not to Jews only; as the prophets (Isaiah and Joel particularly) have long since declared. (See Isaiah xxviii. 16, compared with Rom. ix. 33, and Joel ii. 32, compared with Acts ii. 16 to 21.)

14 *How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher?*

14, 15. Now as this invocation supposes faith, so does that faith instruction; and so again does that instruction a commission given

^m Niceph. C. P. p. 309.

ⁿ Rom. xvi. 9.

^a Matt. iv. 19, 20; Mark i. 16, 17, 18.

15 *And how shall they preach, except they be sent? as it is written, How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things!* to those that bring it. Such as one as Esaias prophesied of, ch. lii. 7, 8.

16 *But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Esaias saith, Lord, who hath believed our report?* 16. And if the subject of our preaching hath not been received as it deserved, this

also agrees with another prediction of the same prophet, ch. liii. 1.

17 *So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.* 17. All which makes it very evident, that though

faith do not always go with instruction, yet it cannot come without it.

18 *But I say, Have they not heard? Yes verily, their sound went into all the earth, and their words unto the ends of the world.* 18. And was this instruction wanting? No. The publication of the gospel hath been as extensive as those declarations of the Divine honour mentioned Psalm xix. 4.

19 *But I say, Did not Israel know? First Moses saith, I will provoke you to jealousy by them that are no people, and by a foolish nation I will anger you.* 19. And can the Jews in particular pretend ignorance? Nay even of this dispensation at which they now take so great offence? No. Moses himself foretold it, Deut. xxxii. 21.

20 *But Esaias is very bold, and saith, I was found of them that sought me not; I was made manifest unto them that asked not after me.* 20. And Isaiah yet more expressly, ch. lxi. 1.

21 *But to Israel he saith, All day long I have stretched forth my hands unto a disobedient and gainsaying people.* 21. Nor does he declare the thing only, but the cause of it too, ver. 2, ascribing the postponing of the Jews to their own obstinacy and unpersuadableness.

COMMENT.

ST. PAUL had, in the beginning of this Epistle^b, proved at large that the method appointed by God for the justification of sinners is faith in Christ and obedience to his gospel. This led him, in the chapter next before, to vindicate that surprising dispensation, whereby the Jews (God's once peculiar people) fell from the truth; and the Gentiles (till then strangers to the covenant of promise) were admitted to partake of the privileges of Christianity. To this purpose he had explained^c those promises to the patriarchs, by a false interpretation whereof their posterity were misled into a vain imagination, that the truth of these and the present manner of God's proceeding could not stand together. He had argued^d from the freedom of God's grace, and shewed how absolutely he is Master of his own favours. He^e had urged how agreeable the distinctions made upon this occasion were, both to the Divine justice and to^f the testimonies of their

^b Ch. iii. iv, v, &c.^c Ch. ix. 6.^d Ver. 14, 15, &c.^e Ver. 21, &c.^f Ver. 25, &c.

own prophets. In the former part of this chapter^s he had compared the conditions required by the gospel with those of that law to which the blind zeal of his adversaries adhered so pertinaciously. Afterwards he goes on, in the scripture now before us^h, to confirm what he had more briefly touched upon before, viz. that they who were rejected had been so punished for their own fault; and they who were taken in were graciously rewarded for their ready compliance with and eager embracing of those terms of salvation, which it well became the Maker and Lord of all freely to provide for and offer to all.

Thus much may suffice for a convenient representation of the apostle's main design in his argument upon this point. The part whereof made the subject of our present meditation begins with that condition now required in order to salvation. A right understanding of which being evidently of the last importance to every Christian, here I shall fix my thoughts, as the principal, at least a very profitable improvement of the Epistle for the day.

Now the matter I mean to treat of we have in these words, *If thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thy heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation*ⁱ.

In discoursing on this matter, it will be proper to inquire into three things:

I. First, what is meant by that *righteousness* and *salvation* which are here mentioned, as the ends of or benefits to be obtained by a Christian's *faith* in and *confession* of Jesus Christ.

II. Secondly, of what nature and extent that *faith* and *confession* are, which we find here enjoined as means necessary in order to obtain those ends.

III. Lastly, wherefore the apostle should choose in this place to comprise under these two the whole of a Christian's duty.

First, I begin with examining what is the true sense of that *righteousness* and *salvation* which are here mentioned as the ends of or benefits to be obtained by a Christian's *faith* in and *confession* of Jesus Christ. Now it seems very plain that each of these words is made use of by the writers of the New Testament in a different extent and twofold sense: but both the one and the other sense may be applicable to this declaration of the apostle, and proper (I had almost said necessary) to be taken notice of in a discourse upon it.

1. As for *righteousness*; this is sometimes intended to denote no more than justification, or an acquittal from sins past. Such is evidently the meaning of it, when *Abraham's faith is said to be counted for righteousness*^k, and when that expression is illustrated and explained by *forgiving iniquities, covering sins, and justifying the ungodly*. Such again, when men are said to *seek, or submit to, to obtain, or to be made the righteousness of God*^l: and in general, such is the sense where it is set to signify, not the act, but the benefit and reward of embracing the gospel; and stands in opposition, not to the crime but

^s Ch. x. 3, &c. ^h Ver. 9 to 21; ch. ix. 30—33. ⁱ Ver. 9, 10. ^k Rom. iii. 25; 1. 5, 6, 7.

^l Ch. iii. 5; ix. 30; x. iii.; 2 Cor. v. 21.

to the punishment of unbelief and disobedience. And thus (to omit other instances at present) it seems to do in the sixth of this Epistle at the sixteenth; where men are called *the servants, as of sin unto death*, so likewise of *obedience unto righteousness*.

But the word does also denote the good actions and dispositions of holy men. Thus we read of *the way of righteousness, the works of righteousness, the fruit and effect of righteousness*^m, and many other phrases of like importance. All which more especially concern the sanctification, and do not (like those of the former sort) belong so properly and immediately to the justification of Christians: and yet this righteousness also (as I have formerly shewed at largeⁿ) is a necessary preliminary and condition of the other, when taken in its most exalted sense, and extended to our full and final justification. Which leads us to observe, in the next place, a twofold sense of the word *salvation* also as it stands here before us.

By salvation then we are sometimes to understand that state of complete safety and happiness into which those pious souls enter, who (to use this apostle's expression elsewhere) *shall be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus*^o. Accordingly we find it called *eternal salvation*^p; we are advised to *take for a helmet the hope of salvation*^q; we are said to *be kept through faith unto salvation*; to *receive the end of our faith, even the salvation of our souls*^r; and told that *Christ shall come the second time without sin unto salvation*^s.

But at other times it is as evidently to be interpreted, not of the end and perfection, but of the way and means to that salvation. So I understand our blessed Lord when declaring to the woman of Samaria that *salvation was of the Jews*^t; and to Zaccheus, that *salvation was that day come to his house*^u; and St. Peter, that *baptism doth now save us*^v; and St. Paul, that *God saved us by the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Ghost*^w; and that the Ephesians were *saved by grace through faith*^x; and sundry other places which clearly signify, not the actual accomplishment of and attaining to everlasting happiness and salvation, but partaking of the means, and being put into the right way, which if persisted in will certainly lead men to the full possession of it.

—II. Let us now proceed, in the second place, to examine into the nature and extent of that *faith* and *confession* which are here enjoined as means necessary for obtaining that *righteousness* and *salvation* already explained.

In a former part of this work^a I took occasion to observe that the first and most obvious sense of faith is an assent of the mind to some truth upon authority or testimony; and that Divine faith is an assent to some truth revealed and testified by God. Thus *believing in the heart that God raised Jesus from the dead*, is a firm persuasion that this was done in such time and manner and for such reasons and purposes as the word of God in the holy Scriptures hath described

^m Prov. viii. 20; 1 John iii. 7; Phil. i. 11; Heb. xii. 11.

ⁿ See Epistle for the thirteenth Sunday after Trinity.

^o 1 Cor. v. 5.

^p Heb. ix. 28.

^q Eph. ii. 8.

^r 1 Cor. v. 5.

^s John iv. 12.

^t Luke xix. 9.

^u See Epistle for the thirteenth Sunday after Trinity.

^v Heb. v. 9.

^w Luke xix. 9.

^x 1 Pet. iii. 21.

^y Titus iii. 5.

^a See Epistle for the thirteenth Sunday after Trinity.

^b 1 Thess. v. 8.

^c 1 Pet. i. 5, 9.

^d 1 Pet. iii. 21.

^e Titus iii. 5.

and declared to us. Agreeably to this construction, *confessing the Lord Jesus with the mouth*, will import an open acknowledgment of Jesus as the Son of God and Saviour of the world, vested in all the powers and prerogatives, the authority and dominion, which the title of *Lord* is designed to signify to us.

But it was farther observed, in the place before referred to, that the faith so highly commended in Scripture hath generally, not some truths barely speculative for its object, but precepts and promises also: and that its act is of a federal nature, solemnly engaging for some conditions required, in view of some considerations offered, and rewards annexed to them: and thus *believing the Lord Jesus with the heart* is owning him for our Lord, by covenanting to be his servants; and *confessing him with the mouth* is very properly applied to those solemn declarations of the Christian faith usual at baptism, the sacrament which lists us in his service, and strikes the covenant made between God and man in Jesus Christ.

Again, as this covenant engages the person for term of life, so the belief and confession upon that occasion implies a firm purpose of heart to persevere in the same persuasion, and to perform the terms required on man's part faithfully and constantly. And hence it comes to pass that the whole of a Christian's duty is frequently comprehended under this single instance of faith. How properly and justly, I am now about to make appear by inquiring, in the

III. Third place, wherefore the apostle should choose, in the passage before us, to mention this *belief* and *confession* as the whole of that condition which entitles a Christian to all the privileges and rewards implied here by *righteousness* and *salvation*.

That this is an extent of the faith to which our complete justification is usually ascribed by St. Paul, might be made abundantly manifest from those passages in his writings which speak of *faith working* or actuated by *love*; of the inefficacy of the former, even in its highest degree, when not crowned with the latter; of the *obedience of faith*, and that declared to be an *obedience both in word and deed*^b; and from the very many other texts enforcing and declaring the necessity of piety and good works. Proofs of this point which have already been insisted on so largely, that, referring my reader thither^c, I shall content myself with observing that such, in all reason, must be the meaning of faith in the place at present before us.

Now of this, I think, we have good intimation from the context, which makes *believing in the Lord*, at the eleventh verse, and *calling upon the name of the Lord*, at the twelfth and thirteenth, expressions illustrating and equivalent. As it does also, at the sixteenth verse, set *not obeying* and *believing* as terms of direct opposition to each other. It being very sure that *calling upon God*, as well as *obeying his word*, is oftentimes put in Scripture to signify a man's duty and virtue in its utmost latitude, and in contrariety, not only to irreligion or unbelief strictly understood, but to all manner of ungodly practice and vicious conversation^d.

^b Gal. v. 6; 1 Cor. xiii. 2, 3; Rom. xvi. 26; xv. 18.

^c See above, p. 256, &c.

^d Psalm xiv. 4; liii. 4; lxxix. 6; lxxx. 18; Jerem. x. 25.

To confirm this yet more, let it be considered what *confession with the mouth* must needs have imported at the time of writing this Epistle. The gospel of Christ was then had in utmost contempt; the professors of it were not only derided, but most barbarously persecuted; and all that the men of the world esteem most dear was made the price of their fidelity to this Lord. Hence it is easy to perceive how different a thing the *confessing Jesus Christ* was then, from that which too many make it now; a matter of mere form and course, the complying with fashion and custom, and carrying an empty title with very poor, if any, regard to those obligations implied in the name and character of Christians and disciples. This is a cheap and easy service, when all the temporal encouragements and advantages that the countenance of government and credit of the world can contribute conspire to promote and recommend it, in comparison of that, which was a bidding open defiance to imminent danger and general opposition. That was a degree of resolution scarce conceivable to be attained without long and serious deliberation; and such as with rational agents can hardly be separated from strict holiness and virtue. For surely they who are not disposed to live to Christ can scarce be imagined capable of being content to forsake all, and to die for him. Here was no room for hypocrisy and time-serving; when all who took upon them this religion were sensible they did it at their utmost peril: and in their very baptism declared war, not only with the devil and the flesh, but, in the very strictest speaking, with the world too; the malice and menaces, no less than the pleasures and vanities and allurements of it. As therefore such solemn profession at first implied a prospect and purpose of encountering these difficulties; so the actual performance of and unshaken perseverance in that holy purpose is a virtue so exalted, as may very well be presumed to include a good life; and to proceed from such assistances of Divine grace, as cannot but determine the person under its influence to all other instances of obedience whatsoever. And as it is thus in the reason of the thing, so was it then in fact and in experience. Orthodox believing and careless living are absurdities at all times, and such as do not in those times seem as yet to have met together in the same person. Although therefore, at the rate Christians now behave themselves, (I am sorry to say,) there is too much occasion for wondering that belief and confession should imply a life exactly suitable to our principles; yet, in those early and better days, this sense of the words was not at all surprising. For then the zeal and vigour of Christians was so conspicuous, that every man's actions and shining example were so many demonstrations of the power of his faith, and ornaments to the doctrine which wrought so sudden and thorough a change in as many as received it.

Thus much I thought expedient to shew what ground the scripture now before us ministers for interpreting St. Paul here, not of a naked faith and formal confession of Christ, but in a sense (so usual in his writings) which, by the mention of one principal part, intends the whole of our duty as Christians. And I think it must be granted that no one part could so properly have this latitude of signification

attributed to it as that of faith, upon the several accounts that follow.

1. If we respect the nature of faith in general. A little reflection upon the springs and principles of human actions may suffice to convince one that all things without affect and excite us, not according as they really are in themselves, but in proportion to the notions we entertain and the concern we apprehend ourselves to have in them. Now faith being a firm persuasion of the truths contained in the gospel (the precepts and promises, as well as the articles of doctrine), it follows that this must needs be first, not only in time and order, but also in the quality of a foundation and cause and root, fitted to shoot out, and produce all other Christian virtues as its proper fruit and genuine effects. These effects it does not necessarily produce, because it is not always a lively but rather a dormant principle; for men are often negligent in exerting its powers. But yet they so naturally follow from thence, that, if we carefully attend to, and do not suffer the motives suggested by it to have their due force obstructed, it will not fail to prevail for the making us in all points the persons we ought to be. The Scripture, therefore, when magnifying the efficacy of faith, speaks of it as it is in its own nature, and upon a presumption that the persons possessed of it do their endeavours to keep its impressions always lively and strong, and its objects familiar to their thoughts. And where this is done the inducements to obedience will be found so powerful, and the conditions of obtaining them so reasonable and necessary, that an assured expectation of the former will draw after it a careful discharge of the latter. It is therefore of the utmost importance to be rooted and grounded in this common principle of goodness. A principle so suited to the operations of rational souls, and whose influence upon our whole behaviour is so universal, that we may say of its efficacy, with regard to the good or evil of our lives, as our Saviour did with regard to his miracles, *according to the strength or weakness of our faith so shall it be unto us.*

2. To comprehend our whole duty under this general term of *faith* was very useful for St. Paul's design; which is, to give his converts a right understanding of the gracious condescensions of the Christian covenant. There are two errors with regard to this matter, which one may plainly discern he found, above all others, necessary to be refuted. The former supposed it possible to be justified by works done without the grace of Christ; the other, that men by good works of any kind were capable of meriting at the hands of God. In opposition to both which he proves, first, that the condition now required is far more easy and practicable than any insisted on before: and then that this, even when made good in such manner as now will be accepted, leaves yet no place for confidence in our own merit, but teaches us to be thankful for our reward, as the grace and free gift of God.

The former of these points St. Paul is actually upon in the passage now before us. For having at the fourth verse mentioned the advantage of *Christ being the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth*, he proceeds in the fifth and three following verses to com-

pare the Mosaical with the Christian dispensation. This comparison proceeds upon the different conditions of obtaining justification under each of them. That of the law saith, *The man who doeth those things shall live by them* *. That is, an exact performance of all the precepts then enjoined was necessary to entitle men to the blessings and rewards then covenanted for. But this of the gospel saith, *Say not in thine heart, Who shall ascend into heaven?* (that is, to bring Christ down from above:) or, *Who shall descend into the deep?* (that is, to bring up Christ again from the dead.) But what saith it? The word is nigh thee, even in thy mouth, and in thy heart: that is, the word of faith, which we preach; that if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved †. The true importance whereof I conceive to be thus much: that the gospel does not, as the law did, propose impracticable terms of obedience, and such as the strength of human nature would find insuperable difficulties in. Now such the apostle had shewed the being justified by our own works to be encumbered with; in regard that a man might be abundantly convinced of the reasonableness, of the necessity, of the obedience required; might watch, might diligently apply himself to it; might lament, and most earnestly struggle with his infirmities; and yet never be able either to conquer those infirmities he continually strove against, or, through the impotence of his condition, attain to that perfection of obedience which he sincerely desired and earnestly laboured after.

But with the gospel the case is quite otherwise. For this suspends all our blessedness upon the belief in and discipleship to Jesus Christ; an holy trust in his truth and merits, and a firm assurance of his resurrection. All which are easy in comparison of the other; because all possible to every one that will act rationally and wisely. And such they manifestly prove themselves to be, whether we consider the duty to be performed or the motives inciting to it. In both which regards the evangelical righteousness hath vastly the advantage above the legal.

The hardship of the legal is abundantly plain, not only from the reasoning of St. Paul in sundry places of this Epistle (which prove the universal corruption of human nature, and, consequent thereupon, the impossibility of punctually discharging either the moral or the Levitical law), but also by his using here those words of Moses, *ascending into heaven and descending into the deep* ‡. For these are, in the Hebrew tongue, proverbial expressions, denoting invincible difficulties. On the contrary, *being nigh* in people's mouths and hearts are phrases in that language as commonly known to import that the thing so spoken of is practicable and easy; and such is the faith and confession here mentioned. This requires no more than a diligent and unprejudiced application of the mind to objects revealed by God; a firm assent upon sufficient evidence of such revelation; and a careful practice of those virtues which that assent (if duly attended and pursued through all its consequences) will naturally enforce and carry believers into. All this no man can reasonably complain of or demur

* Ver. 5.

† Ver. 6—9.

‡ Deut. xxx. 11—14.

to; because it expects no more from any than all are capable of; even fair dealing and consideration, sincerity and constancy, receiving principles established upon good grounds, and acting in agreement and consistence with them when so received and solemnly professed.

Again, as this is a condition of happiness which men are better qualified for discharging, so is it such as they must in all reason be more powerfully disposed for undertaking, than that enjoined by the law. It is with that of religion as with all other service and labour. The toil and trouble of the duty is evermore lessened in proportion to that spirit and vigour of expectation which the prospect of a recompense inspires. And as the certainty and the value of that recompense rise, the difficulty of performing the condition preparatory to it will not fail to sink. Now the circumstances of the law and the gospel are as different in this regard as time and eternity. The former contracted expressly for temporal felicities only; the latter promiseth a reward of bliss, truly and more eminently so than at present any of us is able to conceive. And all we can say of it (which yet is more than enough to command the utmost of our endeavours and the eagerest of our desires) is, that God hath designed to render us complete in that state to come, by the provision of a happiness that can never have any interruption, any abatement, any conclusion. Consequently, the faith which assures us of such a reward must needs be a duty more practicable than a law of works was; which imposed a heavier burden, and yet did not come furnished with advantages in any degree comparable to support men under it.

2. I come now to observe how suitable the comprehending our whole Christian duty under the name of *faith* is to another part of St. Paul's design—that of destroying all confidence in any merit of ours, which such obedience might be falsely supposed to have. To this purpose it is that we find the apostle setting so often in direct opposition to each other, not only faith and works, but also the law and the promise; and frequently asserting the inconsistency between them. *If they (says he) which are of the law be heirs, faith is made void, and the promise made of none effect^k*: and, *If the inheritance be of the law, it is no more of promise^l*: and, *To him that worketh is the reward not reckoned of grace, but of debt^k*: therefore it is of faith, that it might be by grace^l: and, *Where is boasting then? It is excluded. By what law? of works? Nay: but by the law of faith^m*: and, *By grace ye are saved through faith, and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of Godⁿ*. To make these and sundry other texts of like importance appear in their full force, it must always be remembered that the works so zealously disclaimed by this apostle are such as men were therefore apt to value themselves upon, because supposed to perform them by their own proper strength. Herein agree all virtues done in conformity to the law of nature; (the discovery and the motives whereof proceeded from a right improvement of natural reason;) herein all acts of obedience to the law of Moses too: because, though directed by God, yet they had not the promise of any supernatural

^k Rom. iv. 14.

^l Gal. iii. 18.

^k Rom. iv. 4.

^l Rom. iv. 16.

^m Rom. iii. 27.

ⁿ Eph. ii. 8.

assistance. And therefore, as to the discharge, could that have been punctual and full, they must be allowed the person's own entirely; though in respect to the knowledge and discovery, they were not entirely his.

But now the obedience meant here by *faith* is the very reverse of all this. The foundation of it is laid in a belief of such truths as mankind must for ever have remained in ignorance of, had not God of his mercy *made known the riches of his glory, and the mystery which had lain hid from ages and generations*^o. The motives to it are those *exceeding great and precious promises*^p, which no obligation lay upon him to make; we can therefore ascribe them to no other cause but his own free goodness, and a love as undeserved as it is unconceivable. And, which is yet more, the effectual assent to that mystery and the compliance with these motives are consequences of that *Spirit* and his *grace*, which enables and disposes us to obedience, and leaves us no part in our best actions but that of a dutiful and diligent concurrence with those operations, from whence *all our holy desires, all our good designs, and all our just works do originally proceed*. And what glory, what merit, can accrue from those actions whose beginning, progress, end, and efficacy are all from another hand? Surely to Him alone belongs the whole honour, who hath wrought the whole work in us; and without whom we could neither have known, nor desired, nor done, nor obtained acceptance or reward for any thing that is commendable or good. For nothing can so truly be called our own as our follies and sins, our neglects and our infirmities.

3. Once more. I observe, that as the whole duty of a Christian is very properly comprised in *faith* and *confession*, so is the whole object of that faith and confession very significantly intimated by specifying that single article of our Lord's resurrection from the dead. The intent whereof would be very much mistaken should we from hence infer, that nothing more than the hearty belief and public profession of this article alone was in those days required. For it were easy, at this rate of interpreting, to argue, that even this article was not necessary to be solemnly confessed of every Christian, by comparing and sticking perversely to the letter; where the baptisms on the day of Pentecost, of the eunuch, of St. Paul, of the gaoler at Philippi, and of the disciples at Ephesus, are related^q. And yet in all these cases, the context, well attended to, will warrant our concluding that the resurrection, and sundry other articles not expressly mentioned, were openly assented to before and in order to baptism. As therefore *calling on* or *owning* the name of *Jesus*, or declaring a belief that he is *the Son of God*, or the like, are not exclusive in those passages, so neither is his resurrection, in this now before us, exclusive of the rest. The truth is, all these are compendious ways of intimating, and a sufficient implication of all other (and these seem to have been several) fundamental points of Christ's religion, to which a public assent was solemnly declared by every proselyte then received into it.

Contenting myself therefore with this brief admonition in how large a sense some scriptures are to be understood; where by an usual

^o Col. i. 26, 27. ^p 2 Pet. i. 4. ^q Acts ii. 38, 41; viii. 37, 38; ix. 18; xvi. 31, 33; xix. 5.

figure of speech the whole is intended though some principal part only be mentioned; I shall assign a reason or two why Jesus being raised from the dead should be chosen by St. Paul to imply the faith that is believed unto righteousness with the heart, and confessed with the mouth unto salvation.

Now this might be chosen, first, because so unanimously opposed by adversaries of all sorts, that the asserting it was a certain test and character of a Christian. The death of Jesus was the boast of Jews, and no matter at all of controversy with the Gentiles. But still the former judged that death inconsistent with his Messiahship; and as they were infidels in the end and purpose of his death, so were mankind in general in the point of his rising again. This therefore the apostles laboured chiefly to establish. The necessity of a proper choice to supply the place of Judas is laid upon having a person competently qualified to join his testimony with the eleven concerning our Lord's resurrection. The same is urged as a demonstration of God's making Jesus both Lord and Christ in the several accounts of people converted to the faith by the preaching of the apostles^r. The constancy of those apostles, and the attestation of miracles vouchsafed them in that office, are styled giving with great power witness of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus^s. The subject of St. Paul's discourse at Athens was Jesus and the resurrection^t. And to mention but one instance more how distinguishing an article this was then esteemed; after professing an agreement with the Jews in other tenets, he resolves the difference between them into this—*Touching the resurrection of the dead I am called in question*^u. An expression home to our present purpose: for himself explains it thus before Agrippa, that he acted conformably to the prophets, who declared Christ should be the first that should rise from the dead^v.

2. This article was very fit to imply all the rest by reason of the light and evidence it reflects upon them all, and the mighty importance attributed to it in assuring to us the benefits and comforts of the gospel. By this we prove the Divine as well as human nature of our Saviour: for Jesus Christ our Lord, made of the seed of David according to the flesh, is declared to be the Son of God with power, according to the spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead^r. By this, the end and efficacy of his death: for as he was delivered for our offences, so was he raised again for our justification^s. By this, his ascent and exaltation to the throne of God: for the same mighty power which raised Christ from the dead did also set him at God's own right hand in heavenly places, far above all principality and power and might and dominion, and every name that is named, &c. and hath put all things under his feet, and given him to be head over all things to the church, &c.^t. This gives us the certainty of a future judgment: for God hath appointed a day, in the which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained; whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead^u. Hence we learn the

^r Acts i. 22; ii. 24, &c.; iii. 15, &c.; iv. 10, &c.; v. 30, 31, 32; x. 41; xiii. 30, &c.

^s Acts iv. 33. ^t Acts xvii. 18. ^u Acts xxiv. 21. ^v Acts xxvi. 23. ^w Rom. i. 3, 4.

^x Rom. iv. 25.

^y Eph. i. 19—22.

^z Acts xvii. 31.

divinity of the Holy Ghost; because he who is so often said to be raised by God, is also said to be *put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the Spirit*^a; by this (as I shewed before) Christ became *the head of the church*: by this we hope to gain that remission of sins which is conveyed in the sacraments of the church; for *baptism doth now save us* (says St. Peter^b) *by the resurrection of Jesus Christ*; and *we are therefore buried with him in baptism* (says St. Paul^c), *that, like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life*. By this again we are certified of our own resurrection; for *Christ is risen the firstborn from the dead*^d, and *become the firstfruits of them that sleep*^e: and we know that he which raised up Jesus shall also raise us up by Jesus^f. And, lastly, by this all good Christians are assured of everlasting life and happiness; for himself declares that he is gone to *prepare a place for such*; and *that he will come again and receive them to himself, that where he is, there they may be also*^g. Thus the author to the Hebrews styles him *our forerunner, who is entered into heaven for us*^h. And St. Paul in like manner, *If we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so also them which sleep in Jesus shall God bring with him: and so shall they be for ever with the Lord*ⁱ.

From hence it appears how broad a foundation this article of our blessed Redeemer's resurrection lays, and how spacious and weighty a superstructure it is capable of sustaining. Inasmuch that a Christian hath little else to wish for the settling his mind, and determining his judgment in the principles of this religion, but evident proofs of that essential point, which in effect and by plain consequence proves and illustrates the whole scheme. And in this regard it is our glory to have the fullest and most incontestable satisfaction that any matter of this nature can afford. Attestations the best grounded, the most impartially examined, the most clearly delivered, the most miraculously confirmed, the most constantly persisted in, the most carefully transmitted to succeeding ages, that ever any fact could pretend to. In a word, such as all who stand out against must stand self-condemned; because it cannot be any rational uncertainty or doubt that detains them in error or unbelief; while at the same time they make no difficulty of venturing their all in other matters of highest importance upon the credit of testimony infinitely weaker, and prospects of advantage infinitely less engaging. To which purpose I add,

3. Thirdly and lastly, as the examples mentioned under the last particular do all conspire in shewing the fitness of extending the belief of our Lord's resurrection to all the articles of our Christian faith; so do those last mentioned more especially prove the fitness of extending it to faith in the largest sense of the word, as that includes all parts of Christian practice. Thus St. Paul, speaking of being *risen with Christ* in holiness of life, attributes this effect to the belief of *the operation of God, who hath raised him from the dead*^m. And St. Peter saysⁿ, *God hath begotten us again to a lively hope, by the*

^a 1 Pet. iii. 18.^b 1 Pet. iii. 21.^c Rom. vi. 4.^d 1 Coloss. i. 18.^e 1 Cor. xv. 20.^f 2 Cor. iv. 14.^g John xiv. 2, 3.^h Heb. xl. 19, 20.ⁱ 1 Thess. iv. 14, 17.^m Coloss. ii. 12.ⁿ 1 Pet. i. 3.

resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead: even that hope, which (as St. John observes^o) every one that hath purified himself, even as he is pure. In a word, the firm persuasion of our Lord's resurrection infers the certainty of our own. And the state to which the Scriptures promise we shall rise is so perfectly happy and glorious, that no man, who diligently considers and is steadfastly assured of it, can think any thing too hard to be done or endured in order to attain it. Faith is called by the author to the Hebrews *the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen^p.* That is, such an assurance as the mind could not rest upon, even in possession, more firmly; because things distant and future are thus rendered always present to it. And is it to be imagined possible for men (think you) to value any thing comparably to, or to decline any undertaking, any suffering for, the joys of eternity, supposing they had a distinct sight and feeling of them? Possible for any not to flee from sin, and dread every guilty approach toward it more than racks and fires and crosses, the most exquisite tortures, and worst of death; did but the ghastly scene open, and set before their eyes the pains and anguish, the insupportable and everlasting wrath which the damned endure? Would any temptation, though otherwise never so insinuating, be able to make its way and seduce one, in despite of such sensible demonstrations as these? It is not to be conceived. And yet all that would be done this way might (and if we were not wanting to ourselves, would) be done without it: even by the shield of a true, considerate, lively and vigorous faith; which, though proceeding upon another sort of evidence, can yet no more deceive us than the evidence of sense itself.

This faith will therefore be an active principle, always exciting and invigorating our obedience; and by the force of so excellent a reward in prospect, not only equal, but, if duly attended to, infinitely exceed all difficulties and obstructions that might otherwise discourage the performance of our duty. Because it will shew so vast a disparity between the service enjoined and the recompense in reserve for it, as allows no manner of comparison between the poorness and imperfection of the one and the infinite value and complete felicity of the other. But having touched upon this argument already, I shall only make one short reflection from the heads so largely insisted on, and with that conclude this discourse.

Now from hence I most heartily wish men would take occasion seriously to consider their duty rightly to understand the privileges of their high calling, and particularly to guard against two very different and dangerous opinions, which unwary people have fastened upon this and sundry like places of Scripture. All which, I conceive, were easy to be effected by having due regard to those distinctions laid down under my first and second heads.

How warm hath been the dispute in this part of the Christian world particularly, concerning the sufficiency of faith, and the necessity of good works in order to salvation! And yet all might be amicably composed, and errors in both extremes prevented, by attend-

ing to the different senses and subjects to which the same words are applied in Scripture; so as not to confound or bring these in evidence for consequences quite out of the purpose of each of the places respectively.

A man, for instance, may observe *faith* to be (as to be sure it often is) used for the assent to and federal confession of the truths revealed by Christ at entering into the gospel covenant; and he shall at the same time find *righteousness* and *salvation* attributed to such *faith*. And yet he will see no ground from thence to infer that *faith* without good works, after baptism, can save him; if he withal remember that by *righteousness* is sometimes intended no more than the remission of sins past before baptism: and that *salvation* sometimes means no more than being brought into the true and right way, which will at last be sure to save all that continue in it to the end. For there is a manifest difference between God's releasing all former debts, and admitting us to a new contract with him; and requiring no account how we perform that contract afterwards, the conditions whereof we, at entering into it, did by our own act and deed bring on, as a subsequent and voluntary debt upon ourselves. On the other hand, a man may discern that *righteousness* and *salvation* are sometimes set to signify the sanctification of our persons, and the final everlasting happiness prepared for the faithful in heaven. In consequence of this he may clearly see and boldly assert the necessity of good works, done in the covenant and with the grace of Christ. And yet he may be far from thinking those works the meritorious cause of our salvation; or derogating in the least from any of those glorious effects ascribed to *faith* in Scripture. The reason is, because, as those others are, so is the word *faith* also sometimes taken in a very large extent. And then it does very properly and very naturally include all Christian virtues and graces whatsoever. And in this more extended sense of *faith*, and in that more exalted sense of *righteousness* and *salvation*, it is certainly true, that none but such as *order their conversation aright shall see the salvation of God*.⁴

I close this remark with the words of our excellent church, whose judgment and prudence and great temper I would to God all her adversaries would impartially consider, and all her members carefully imitate.

We are accounted righteous before God, only for the merit of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ by faith, and not for our own works or deservings: wherefore, that we are justified by faith only is a most wholesome doctrine, and very full of comfort.⁵ But then observe what follows: *Albeit that good works, which are the fruits of faith, and follow after justification, cannot put away our sins, and endure the severity of God's judgment; yet are they pleasing and acceptable to God in Christ; and do spring out necessarily of a true and lively faith, insomuch that by them a lively faith may be as evidently known as a tree discerned by the fruit*.⁶

⁴ Psalm l. 23.⁵ Articles of Religion, XI.⁶ Art. XII.

THE GOSPEL. St. Matt. iv. 18.

18 *Jesus, walking by the sea of Galilee, saw two brethren, Simon called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea: for they were fishers.* 18. To understand the whole procedure of our Lord upon this occasion, the reader need only cast his eye back on the Gospel for the fifth Sunday after Trinity, p. 153—155 of this volume.

19 *And he saith unto them, Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men.*

20 *And they straightway left their nets, and followed him.*

21 *And going on from thence, he saw other two brethren, James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother, in a ship with Zebedee their father, mending their nets; and he called them.*

22 *And they immediately left the ship and their father, and followed him.*

COMMENT.

THE passage now before us gives an account of our Lord's calling four great apostles (to the memory of one of which this festival is sacred), and of their ready compliance with that call. The design of that call was to make them powerful instruments of instructing and profiting others; to enter them into a profession, for the due discharge whereof all their time and pains would be little enough; and therefore it was expected they should give themselves wholly to it. A profession whose end it is to wean our affections from the present world; of which each of them hath set us a noble example in ridding himself presently of all secular interests and encumbrances, and by an entire application to his new Master's business. For that is the meaning of *immediately leaving their nets*, their ships and their father, *and following Jesus*: that they from thenceforth became his inseparable attendants; sharers of his labours and his fortunes; no longer solicitous for themselves or their families; but entirely depending on his bounty and blessing for their future provision and subsistence.

The manner of my treating this subject shall be,

I. First, to shew the motives which we may easily reasonably presume induced the persons here to this compliance.

II. Secondly, to observe the virtue of that obedience. And,

III. Thirdly, to consider how far they in so doing are a proper pattern for our imitation.

I. The motives which seem to have induced the persons mentioned here to this compliance are such as follow:

1. Of the apostle of this day in particular, it is certain, from the first chapter of St. John^t, and of the rest it is highly probable, that they had been trained under John the Baptist. Now the very intent of

^t John i. 36—40.

John's being brought into the world, and living in it after so uncommon a manner, is expressly declared to be, that he might *prepare the way* for Jesus by preaching the doctrine of repentance, and *turning the hearts of the disobedient to the wisdom of the just* ^u. To this eminent person God manifested his Son by the vision of a dove and a voice from heaven: of which he bore so constant and faithful testimony, that neither the admiration of the Jews nor the emulation of his own disciples could ever prevail with him either to suppress it, or to take to himself those honours and opinions which might prove any diminution to the Messiah. From him were evidently derived the first notices which Andrew and his brother Peter had of Christ. Nor is it to be conceived that any retainers to him should continue ignorant of that person's character, whose preference above himself John took such care perpetually to inculcate, and so to raise a due veneration for, and turn his hearers at last over to, a far greater and better Master.

2. But besides what these disciples might have learnt from the Baptist, they had other motives of obedience, even from Jesus himself. For he was before this call sufficiently distinguished by his miracles and his doctrine. St. Matthew indeed, agreeably to his usual conciseness, places this action next after our Lord's entrance upon his public ministry, and gives only a short and summary account of it. But St. Luke ^x, whose manner is more large and express, informs us of many preachings in the synagogues, many devils cast out, many diseases healed, great and frequent concourse of admiring crowds; and, which might more contribute to the gaining these fishermen, the scene of all those actions lay in Capernaum, and other towns bordering upon the sea of Galilee, where they trafficked and inhabited.

Add to all this the circumstances of the call itself. Of which (as hath been formerly demonstrated ^y) Christ did not make the experiment, till he had first informed their judgments, by teaching the multitudes out of one of their ships, and brought the power of his doctrine home to their senses by commanding a miraculous draught of fishes, in the very place where they had toiled all night and caught nothing. So that after a reputation so established, instructions so divine, wonders so astonishing, and the impressions of one in their own way so fresh upon them, these fishers might very well justify their entering into the service of such a Master: and we should have more cause to wonder at their declining than we can have at their forwardness to *leave all and follow him*. The accounting for which in the manner you have seen, I take to be much more satisfactory than ascribing it to any such commanding lustre in the person and countenance of our Lord, as some have imagined. For asserting that, I know not that the Scriptures give us any authority; and the arguments here alleged seem to render it as unnecessary as the word of God hath left it uncertain.

I cannot let this particular quite go without one reflection, naturally rising from the method now taken in proof of it. From this instance I mean to observe how useful it is to interpret Scripture by

^u Luke i.^x Ch. iv.^y Gospel for the fifth Sunday after Trinity.

reading, considering, and diligently comparing the several parts of it together. Most errors in religion, and either accidental or wilful misconstructions of the evangelists and their writings, had been prevented by this care. How vain for the purpose are the pretended absurdities and insolent reproaches of Porphyry upon the instance now before us, grounded on St. Matthew's relation alone! Where is the suspicion of falsehood in the historian? or, allowing him to say true, where is the blind enthusiasm and frantic zeal which he charges this action with, when St. Luke is also taken into the account, and the order of the whole proceeding rightly stated from them both? The apologies of the Fathers shew the case to be much the same with all the bitter invectives against which they defended the faith. The only confutation then ordinarily needful was to set the matter in its true light by that evidence and mutual illustration which several passages, treating of the same subject, do mutually contribute to each other. It is certainly a great instance of the wisdom and goodness of Providence that the doctrine and deportment of Jesus are transmitted to the world by several hands. And an argument it is also of their dealing truly with us, that, although writing at times and places far distant, yet all of them should so express themselves as never once to contradict, but frequently to clear and assist each other. Would therefore all, would even the unlearned, improve the helps afforded them in the margin of their Bibles, by consulting the parallel texts referred to there, they would soon feel that each evangelist is best understood by the study of the rest. And at last so just an harmony would result from all together, that, notwithstanding any seeming harshness from little discords, no necessary truths would be undiscovered, no dangerous errors entertained, no inconsistencies or difficulties of moment remain incapable of being fairly reconciled by such readers. So short, so easy, and withal so useful a way to divine truth, I thought this a fit occasion to recommend. Which I do yet more earnestly, because the most satisfactory and full of assurance of any whatsoever. The commentaries of learned men may be very entertaining and instructive; but we can never sit down with so perfect acquiescence in the meaning of God's word as when the Holy Ghost condescends to comment and expound upon himself. All therefore who sincerely desire to have Scripture truly and fairly understood labour to establish this sort of explication, by which the light divine falling on different points, is, by drawing them into a proper position, reciprocally reflected from each upon the other. That of St. Paul to the Corinthians being applicable to this case also—*As no man knoweth the things of a man, save the spirit of man which is in him; even so the things of God knoweth no man, but the Spirit of God*². He alone could at first reveal them; he is the sure guide in all our studies of the truths so revealed; and his own dictates are incomparably the brightest evidence to form our notions upon.

II. From this digression (if it deserve to be thought one), I come now, in the second place, to observe the virtue of these apostles in obeying the call of Jesus. Without just and sufficient inducements

we may allow this *following* to be rashness and folly: for no action can be virtuous that is not rational. God certainly deals with us as he made us; and requires nothing at our hands of which a good account may not be rendered to any considering and impartial mind. But herein lies the virtue; when difficult and distasteful cases offer, to preserve the mind free and clear, the judgment open and unbiassed, the affections regular and flexible, and the whole man ready and resolved to submit and act, as his conscience, after all due care for informing it aright, shall declare necessary or fit for him. Look upon the gospel at its first setting out; look upon the different successes of it ever since; you shall find the entertainment and influence of its doctrine constantly to have answered to the failure or discharge of its hearer's duty in this point. The same Jesus, who with a word of his mouth prevailed upon these apostles to follow his person and his fortunes, did yet work miracles without number, and multiply sermons and conferences among the Jews with very little effect. The reason is, these men were not only well instructed, but well disposed; and through the efficacy of his grace, content, nay, glad to leave the world for him: whereas the scribes and Pharisees, whose hearts were set on secular and dishonest advantages, resisted that grace, and determined not to believe him at any rate.

The rich young man came much better (and, as he thought, sufficiently) prepared to undertake any condition requisite for attaining eternal life^a. His breast reproached him not with the express breach of any precept in the moral law; and yet he, whose former diligence to live well had made him confident of his own innocence, when brought to the trial, was found far short of perfection—*Go sell that thou hast, and give to the poor, and come and follow me*, was a command too hard of digestion. And yet a positive promise of *treasure in heaven*, in recompense for the possessions to be abandoned upon earth, was added for an encouragement; and an admonition that he was not invited to loss, but to a wise and profitable exchange.

So much below these fishers was even the man who could say—*All these have I kept from my youth up*^b. Nay, who, as if that had been a virtue too low for the greatness of his mind, aspires after nobler degrees of goodness, and asks eagerly, *What lack I yet?* It may perhaps be answered that *this young man had greater possessions*, and so more to endear the world to him, than these apostles. But when it is considered that they readily left their *all*, be that *all* less or more, we should injure their character not to think that the difference of circumstances in this comparison was not near so great as that of dispositions: and that whatever their estates had been, they would cheerfully have given the same proof how far they preferred the service of God before that of mammon. Ease and prosperity must be allowed to knit the net stronger; but all whose condition is not perfectly deplorable and indigent get a good conquest over them selves, when they break through it by shaking hands with a fortune or employment, which, though somewhat inferior, hath yet any comfort and competency in it. And therefore it was no vulgar virtue in

^a Matt. xix. 16, &c.^b Matt. xix. 20.

these fishers to quit a trade laborious indeed, but yet a creditable and honest subsistence; and to cast themselves and their families at once upon the future care and providence of One who openly disclaimed the world, and had not of his proper possession so much as *where to lay his head*.

III. Having thus spoken to the case of the apostles, I come, in the last place, to the profit we should make of it, by considering how far this behaviour of theirs is a pattern fit for our imitation.

That it is not such in all points is most evident by reason our condition in many regards is not, and in some cannot be parallel to theirs. Our first step therefore toward improvement by this example must be to distinguish wherein our circumstances differ or agree: and the next is from the correspondence still between us, to form a judgment of such calls, and prepare our hearts for such compliances, as, in the present state of the gospel and our own affairs, we continue capable of.

As to the former of these particulars, there is a manifest diversity between our calls to Christ and that of these fishermen, both for the manner and the matter of them.

I. For the manner. We have not now the happiness of conversing with Jesus in the flesh; our ears are not charmed with the sound of his gracious words, nor our eyes entertained with the wonderful operations of his divine power. And so our motive to obedience is not the very same with theirs, whose evidence of sense wrought first astonishment, and then firm belief. We read and hear and receive a distant report of these things; they were present at them. A difference by some thought material enough to excuse men from yielding, at this time of day, an assent like theirs heretofore, who are pretended to have been under so much more forcible means of conviction.

But this is a poor evasion. For I take leave to say that we have, in some regards, so much the advantage even of them who conversed with Jesus, and saw his mighty works, as must, I conceive, render our infidelity and disobedience in no degree less inexcusable than theirs. The apostles saw Christ's state of humiliation, and they saw that only at the time when this call wrought upon them. We have known not that only, but his glorification also; the power of his resurrection from the dead, the punctual accomplishment of all his terrible threatenings against the Jewish city and nation; and that most amazing of all miracles, the firm establishment and vast extent of his kingdom by the propagation of his gospel, and perpetuity of his church, in despite of all the subtlety and undermining arts of disputers and deceivers, all the treachery of hypocrites and false friends, all the implacable rage and bitter persecutions of malicious and avowed enemies. All this we see and feel, and enjoy the effect of still: and such events they are, as no less cause can account for than the peculiar favour and irresistible power and stupendous wisdom of an Almighty God, evidently asserting and sustaining his own institution.

Farther yet. Though we do not now see the lame strengthened, nor the blind enlightened, nor the lunatic and possessed restored, nor the

dead raised, in our villages and cities, yet, even for these works, which demonstrated Jesus to be the Son of God, we have all the evidence that is proper, all that is possible for matters of this nature. The constant testimony ever since of men in all ages and conditions, too many to be imposed upon; in interests too different to combine for imposing upon others; and in a cause which ministers no temptation for any such imposture, admitting it to have been practicable. This is sufficient to convince reasonable and unprejudiced persons; and the unreasonable and prejudiced nothing will convince. To such we find the now so much extolled evidence of sense was not effectual: nor did the daily wonders of our Saviour convert an equal part of all that saw and stood astonished at them. From all which I presume we may infer, that they who are now called to Christ by the impressions of his written word, by the voice of his ministers, by the ordinances and sacraments of his most holy religion, and by the secret motions of his grace working in and with and by their own wills and consciences, are strictly obliged to hearken to such calls. For though the method of calling be not the same to all, yet the evidence of that call is to all so full as at their utmost peril to engage their obedience.

2. Again. As the call of these apostles differs from that now ordinarily vouchsafed in the manner of making it, so does it likewise in the matter or thing required by it. They were drawn off from their secular employments, and commanded so to follow their Master as to depend upon his provision for the future: but the generality of Christians are required to *work with their own hands*^c; to *abide in their respective callings with God*^d; in short, not to quit their professions, but to do their duty in them. And this duty is well done by an honest industrious care for ourselves and families; when that care is not suffered to get so far within us as to shut out those measures of living, which justice and decency, beneficence and charity, the offices of religion, and placing our treasure and hearts in heaven, demand from us. The world may be our concern, provided it be not our only nor our chief concern; and the comforts of it esteemed good, so they be not mistaken for our supreme good. So plain it is, that the call which our church, in this day's service^e, prays God we may be ready to obey, is vastly different from that vouchsafed to the saint of it and his companions. Let us, in the last place, look what correspondence there is which still continues to affect us: and for that I beg your attention to the two following particulars:

1. First, the case of these apostles is so far our pattern, that whatsoever is enjoined us by Christ in his word we should immediately submit to it; whether it be any truth commanding our belief, or any precept calling for our practice. Such a submission be sure I mean, as agrees with the character given of these apostles' compliance in the former part of this discourse. Such as is the result of wisdom and deliberation, a reasonable service and a well-weighed choice; all heat and precipitance apart, on the one hand, all obstinacy and prejudice on the other. Nor is this necessary to be urged upon them only who

^c Eph. iv. 28.^d 1 Cor. vii. 24.^e Collect.

have as yet not received or are not well acquainted with the principles of Christianity; but even they who profess and know these best are not always so happy as to attend to every part of them justly. How greedily do men take an opinion wherein their own affairs are not concerned; and yet stand out against much stronger evidence for others which happen to cross their interest, or bear hard upon some beloved error with which they have been long prepossessed! How quick and sagacious are most of us in discerning, how severe in judging, how ingenious and officious in exposing and rebuking, the faults and failings of our brethren; and at the same time, how blindly partial, how slow in discovering, how subtle in extenuating, nay, how zealous in justifying, the very same in ourselves! How many Herods have we who hear their preachers gladly, and are content to do many things of their advising; but when the point of Herodias is touched, when any favourite lust or darling pleasure is reproved, then *the deaf adder stops her ears, let the charmer charm never so wisely*. That pass shall be maintained at any rate; and they are not, cannot, will not be persuaded. Now what a mighty difference is there between a perverseness so inflexible as this, and the easy yielding temper of these apostles! Would they, can we think, have been detained by any single obstruction, who so cheerfully devoted to Christ themselves and their all at once? Sure then we little consider their behaviour, or have considered it to little purpose, if it do not draw us so far at least towards an imitation as to hearken patiently, and go in dutifully to any one unpalatable doctrine for his sake.

2. Once more. This example shews how loose the things of the present world ought to sit about us. The command of *going and selling all we have, and following Christ*^f, is what very few are put upon, but yet it is what every one ought to be provided for. Now the best preparation for abandoning that which cannot be kept without guilt is to employ it innocently and virtuously while we have it. It is not wealth, but the inordinate love of wealth, that justifies the comparison of the camel and the needle's eye. For how small is the appearance, that a sordid wretch, who cannot find in his heart to spare a part of his superfluities to pious or charitable uses, will be brought to sacrifice the whole even of his necessities to God and a good conscience! *Using this world therefore as not abusing it*, a constant thankful sense of all we have being lent us from above, enjoying it with modesty and meekness, dedicating a portion of it to the service of the great Proprietor; consulting the honour and dignity of his service, the decency and beauty of his house; laying out our pains and our possessions upon public benefactions, for increase of arts and sciences and honest industry; and studying to render the talents intrusted with us the most instrumental that may be to the benefit of others: these dispositions and actions are a good step towards being well content, nay, glad to purchase a distant treasure in heaven with a surrender of all our substance upon earth. And if we be so resigned as to *take up our cross and follow Christ*, that is, to strip off every comfort, even life itself, when called to it, then have we attained to the grace of

^f 1 Cor. vii. 31.

these apostles. And as oft as God by his providence orders matters so, that a man's honours or riches or employments cannot be preserved with a good conscience; in a word, when any Christian is reduced to an unavoidable necessity of either sinning or suffering; then is he called by Christ; then ought he to understand the obligation as great, and the command as express and peremptory, as if (like this apostle) he had heard the voice of Jesus sounding in his ears—*Leave all, and follow me.*

Some indeed have thought it the most eminent and acceptable obedience to this call, to run away out of the world, and shake hands with all business and avocation at once, by devoting their persons to a cloister and their whole substance to piety. Far it is from my purpose to derogate from any methods proper for promoting heavenly-mindedness and contempt of the world. But doubtless such a resolution, like all others that are full of zeal, ought to be well regulated; founded upon true principles, and tempered with great discretion. It is not for every man to renounce an active life, and deprive the public of a serviceable member in a station of care and trust: nor are any man's possessions so entirely his own, but that his family and his friends have some right to share in them. We see our Lord highly condemns the Jewish Corban of corruption and hypocrisy: and what was that, but making over to pious uses that which ought to have sustained fathers or mothers, those to whom nature hath either made us debtors already, or given an equitable expectation of being profited by us?

Let those then who are desirous to imitate these apostles, in leaving all and following Christ, be careful especially to imitate that first circumstance, of staying till he call them. But call them he does not, till all things are so ordered that no relation or capacity wherein they stand, no duty or benefit justly expected from them, shall come under a necessity of remaining unsatisfied by means of such a choice.

Now this being the case, that happens much seldomer than men are aware: it shall suffice for us, and for Christians in general, to use what the bounty of God hath given us conscientiously, to promote, and, as we can, be liberal and rich in pious and good works; not to be guilty of any evil thing for the greatest advantage; if our dearest enjoyments cannot be preserved with innocence, to give them up cheerfully; and how low soever reduced, to take every appointment of the Divine Providence patiently and contentedly; trusting God both for present supplies and a future reward. This is truly to *give ourselves up obediently to fulfil his holy commandments*: and they who thus *pass through things temporal shall not fail in the end of things eternal*^b; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

^a Collect.

^b See Collect for the fourth Sunday after Trinity.

ST. THOMAS'S DAY.

A short Account of St. Thomas.

THE name of this apostle (and *Didymus* the interpretation of it) signifies a twin. His descent and country Scripture makes no mention of. Nor of his education and business, except from the company and employment we find him in at the twenty-first of St. John's Gospel, we infer, as some have done, that he was a fisherman, and concerned with Peter in carrying on that trade.

Three of the evangelists take no other notice of him than what regards his call to the apostleship. St. John alone is particular concerning him. He first acquaints us with his behaviour upon our Lord's determining to go and raise Lazarus^a. The other disciples, upon making this motion, remind our Lord of that implacable malice which lately appeared in the Jews attempting to stone him; and since he thought that a just occasion for withdrawing beyond Jordan, they could not suppose he would think it proper so soon to put himself in the way of so much danger again. Our Lord had, at the ninth verse of that chapter, given them a parabolical intimation that his hour was not yet come. But this being either not understood or not effectually applied, after other discourse to put this journey aside, upon our Lord's saying, *Lazarus is dead—nevertheless let us go to him; Thomas said unto his fellow-disciples, Let us also go, that we may die with him*^b.

St. Chrysostom makes this an argument of greater cowardice in Thomas than in any of the rest: others look upon it as an instance of affection and resolution. The most natural interpretation seems to be, that though he saw nothing but death like to follow upon their going again so near Jerusalem, yet, if Jesus were determined to hazard his person, it would ill become them to desert him, whatever the consequence might be. This sense appears to be necessary, if by dying with him be meant of *Jesus*. And the *dying with Lazarus* carries so much of irony and poignancy as was neither decent in respect to our Lord, nor at all agreeable to this apostle's manner; for how full of other good qualities soever he might be, he seems to have been slow enough of apprehension. This appears not only from the meaning of our Saviour, at the ninth and tenth verses, not being understood—in which his brethren were equal with him—but more so from another instance in the fourteenth chapter^c, where our Lord's words are more intelligible. And most of all by that unpersadable stiffness in the point of Christ's resurrection, which makes the subject of this day's Gospel.

The province assigned to this apostle's labours was Parthia^d. St. Chrysostom adds Ethiopia^e, Gregory Nazianzen, India^f. Some learned men of late doubt of this last^g. At least they think the name of St. Thomas Christians no evidence at all; and ascribe their

^a John xi.^b Ver. 14, 15, 16.^c Ver. 5.^d Euseb. lib. iii. c. 1.^e Hom. in 12. Apost.^f Orat. in Arrian.^g Le Sueur ad ann. Chr. 60.

original to one of the same name many centuries after. But it hath generally been received that St. Thomas did not only preach, but suffer martyrdom in India; and that he was lanced to death by the people, whom the idolatrous Brachmans had instigated thus to dispatch a dangerous opposer of their idolatrous worship. The account of him in St. Jerome's Catalogue is so short that I will conclude with it. "Thomas the apostle, as the common tradition goes, preached our Lord's gospel to the Parthians, Medes, Persians, Germans, Hyrcanians, Bactrians, and Magi: and died at the city Calamino in India." If this authority be good, why may not the Magi explain to us what sort of Ethiopians St. Chrysostom means? Those probably of the same country (near Chaldaea) from whence they came who worshipped our Saviour in his infancy. Whether those very persons, let the reader who is disposed to inquire believe as he shall see cause.

THE COLLECT.

ALMIGHTY and everlasting God, who for the more confirmation of the faith didst suffer thy holy apostle Thomas to be doubtful in thy Son's resurrection^a; Grant us so perfectly, and without all doubt, to believe in thy Son Jesus Christ, that our faith in thy sight may never be reproved. Hear us, O Lord, through the same Jesus Christ, to whom, with thee and the Holy Ghost, be all honour and glory, now and for evermore. Amen.

THE EPISTLE. Eph. ii. 19.

19 *Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellow-citizens with the saints, and of the household of God;* 19. By virtue of Christ's blood and faith in him, not only Jews but the Gentiles, indeed the whole company

of believers, are no longer under any restraints or distinctions, like sojourners, but rather like inhabitants, persons of the same community, who stand equal in all privileges, and, like those of the same family, have free access to the master of it, even God.

20 *And are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner-stone;* 20. Nay, like parts of the same building, ye all stand upon the doctrine of the apostles under the New, which is exactly of a piece with that of the prophets under the Old Testament. And Jesus Christ is the key-stone and centre of union.

21 *In whom all the building fully framed together groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord;* 21. In him it is that every part of this foundation and superstructure doth rest: nor is this a common house, but one consecrated to God for holy uses.

22 *In whom ye also are builded together* 22. Even a temple where

^a John xi. 24—30.

for an habitation of God through the Spirit. he dwells by the presence of his Spirit; a Spirit of unity and peace, in which the edification of his church properly consists.

COMMENT.

I HAVE had frequent occasions to observe with what indignation the Jews received the admission of the Gentiles to a partnership in the knowledge of the gospel¹. They to whom alone the oracles of God were formerly committed bore themselves so high upon this most valuable privilege, as to imagine that method injurious to them which enlarged the extent of any new revelation beyond the limits which had bounded the legal one. And even when the conversion of Cornelius and some others, warranted by visions and miraculous gifts, had abundantly declared God's gracious design of granting to the Gentiles also *repentance unto life*², yet did their vanity still suggest a notion of some necessary reserves in that grant, and of considerable distinctions to be still kept up between such as before had been termed *the heirs of promise* and *the children of the kingdom*, and others called to this light from the grossest darkness, and raised out of the very dregs of mankind. This opinion the converts from the law brought along with them into Christianity. Which turned both to their own mighty prejudice, from the natural effects of so false a confidence, and to the great discouragement of those who had come directly over from heathenism, without any regard at all paid to the Levitical institution.

Of this latter sort were the Ephesians, to whom St. Paul addressing, labours to make them sensible of the happy change they had made, who, from the lowest and most deplorable estate of men *without Christ, aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, strangers from the covenants of promise, without hope, and without God in the world*³, were not only *made nigh*⁴, but in all points equal to the persons who had shared in those covenants and advantages before. This equality of advancement is proved, first, from the universal redemption wrought by the death of Christ; and then by the unity of that body, into which the whole assembly of believers are thereby compacted⁵. In proof of these he makes use (1.) of some allusions borrowed from the old law; (2.) of the extent of that commission by which the gospel is preached; and (3.) of several figurative representations⁶. To these I must at present confine my thoughts, because they make the substance of the Epistle for this festival.

It is not my design to treat here of the unity of the church in the utmost latitude of that important point; but only to observe, so far as the expressions in this scripture lead us, what sort of union that is by which the several parts of it are knit to each other; and what are the uses and practical inferences fit to be by us collected from such representations.

This union is sometimes illustrated by the allegory of natural, sometimes by that of civil, and at other times by that of artificial

¹ Rom. iii. 21.² Acts x. xi.³ Ver. 12.⁴ Ver. 13.⁵ Ver. 14, 15, 16.⁶ Ver. 14, 15, 17, 19, &c.

bodies. Of the first, as the apostle here makes no mention, so neither is it needful for my purpose to make any, after so large an explanation of it as hath been given heretofore^p. The two others lie now before us. That of a civil body, at the nineteenth verse, where the Ephesians are said to be *no more strangers and foreigners, but fellow-citizens with the saints, and of the household of God*. That of an artificial body in the verses following, *Ye are built, &c.*

As to the former of these, it may be proper to consider, that it was usual with the Jews to permit men of other nations to join themselves to the God of Abraham, and to allow them both civil and religious advantages in proportion as they were content to oblige themselves to more or less of their laws and customs. But even they who undertook the whole were not esteemed to stand upon the same foot with the natural stock of Abraham; and, as a mark of the difference between them, went therefore still by the name of *strangers*. With regard to this distinction, the apostle may reasonably be supposed to acquaint his Ephesians that those titles and differences of advantage were now at an end. And that in Christ it mattered not whence any man was descended, since *the partition wall was broken down*^q, and the benefits of the gospel thrown open to all the faithful in common.

It is also notorious that in every city many persons are permitted to enjoy the protection, mutual conversation, friendships, and sundry other conveniences of inhabitants at large; who yet having no concern in the municipal laws and customs, exemptions and advantages of the corporation, continue foreigners to the constitution, though not to the place. These are properly the *παροικαι* or *foreigners*, spoken of here by St. Paul. In opposition to whose precarious state, he assures his heathen converts that even they come in to a full claim of every immunity and benefit granted to the saints, to any of the faithful whatsoever: that all are now upon the same level, and hold by the same charter; notwithstanding some before were detested as vile and impure, and others of them dignified with the character of a *holy nation* and *peculiar people*.

But we may very lawfully indulge a greater latitude of construction, and, without regard to converted Jews and heathens, apply the word *saints* to believers, not of all countries only, but all ages too. And what a spacious view does this open! How glorious a society is that which consists of the spirits of all the just men that ever were or ever shall be made perfect! What freedoms, what honours must those be which these shining lights are exalted to! And (as the immunities and benefits of bodies corporate are not confined to dwellers upon the spot, but follow the free denizen whithersoever he goes) what an encouragement is it in our present sojourning, that, even at this distance, we have a right to the same privileges, and are making forward to the same full enjoyments! In a word, the noble hopes which this consideration should inspire, the generous emulations of their virtues which it should provoke, the conformity to the manners and usages of that heavenly city it should actually persuade, are subjects which I

^p See Epistle for the first Sunday after Epiphany.

^q Ver. 14.

should reckon it both a pleasure and a duty to enlarge upon, had not that been done in another part of this work^r, to which I beg my reader's leave to refer him.

To bring this union yet nearer, Christians are said here to be *of the household of God*. Follow-citizens have indeed a very profitable and engaging relation to each other in point of properties and commerce and mutual intorests: but even the nearest of these must give place to theirs who compose the same family. Especially when our capacity in the family is considered, that *we are no longer servants, but children*. And consequently this implies all the ties of blood, the sonship, the adoption, the inheritance. Concerning which I again refer my reader to two former discourses upon that subject^s.

The next resemblance made use of by the apostle is that of an artificial body; and signifies the unity of the Christian church, by comparing it to a building. In which he is strengthened by St. Peter also, who says of them who have received the faith, that *they come to Christ as unto a living stone, and are themselves, as lively stones, built up a spiritual house*^t. The expressions of *lively stones* and *a spiritual house* do sufficiently intimate the boldness of the metaphor; and forbid too critical an inquiry after the agreement of the similitude with the thing figured by it in every circumstance. And therefore it will be an instance of our wisdom, as well as modesty, to contain our thoughts within the compass of such circumstances as St. Paul hath thought it proper to ground this comparison upon.

Now the first argument before us of the church's unity is taken from its having the same foundation. So the twentieth verse—*Ye are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner-stone*^u. The same apostle elsewhere compares his labour in propagating the gospel to *building*^x; he gives to the brethren in commission with him at Corinth the style of *labourers together with God*^y, and to the disciples converted by their doctrine, that of *God's building*. He distinguishes himself by the title of a *wise master-builder*, who had *laid the only true foundation, even Christ Jesus*. He warns all others against advancing unsound and hurtful doctrines, by bidding them look well what materials they lay upon this foundation. Now by comparing these texts it will be easy to discern the meaning of St. John's description of the heavenly Jerusalem, by a *city, whose wall had twelve foundations, and in them the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb*^z. And again, how Jesus Christ being declared the only foundation can agree with this assertion, that the church is *built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets*.

The apostles, though later in time, are yet first named, because superior in dignity to the prophets. These only saw and foretold at a great distance those blessed events of which the other saw and recorded the entire accomplishment. These had the graces and miraculous powers of the Holy Ghost more sparingly; which the other had

^r See Epistle for the twenty-third Sunday after Trinity.
day after Christmas, and the eighth Sunday after Trinity.

^u Rom. xv. 20.

^x 1 Cor. iii. 10.

^y 1 Cor. ii. 12.

^s See Epistle for Sunday after Christmas.

^t 1 Pet. ii. 4, 5.

^z Rev. xxi. 14, 19.

in the most plentiful and astonishing measures imparted to them. These laid the first imperfect groundwork of that spiritual fabric which the apostles carried up and put the finishing hand to. And both the one and the other are called the foundation of that faith in which they by their preaching and writings were the instruments of building men up. But Jesus Christ is styled the foundation, because he is materially and primarily, not only ministerially or instrumentally so. That is, the wonderful economy of his incarnation, all that he did and suffered for mankind, and all the noble ends and effects of it, are the adequate object of a Christian's faith. And the laying this foundation was a work common to prophets and apostles both. Both agreed in the same design of their ministry; both delivered doctrines in substance the same; the difference between them lay only in the manner of propounding this object. For according to the different periods in which they lived and taught, the same Jesus was represented as yet more obscurely, in expectation, and to come; or else explicitly and fully, as in possession, and already come. And hence he is called *the corner-stone*, as that in which the several parts, not of the building only, but even of the foundation also, centre and are supported. This renders Jews and Gentiles both one house; this renders prophets and apostles both one foundation. And the faith being one and the same, as to the subject-matter of it, the church of God, built upon and distinguished by that faith, is consequently one and the same from the beginning to the end of the world. It being always true with regard to the ordinary methods of grace and salvation, that there is not, nor ever was, *any other name under heaven given among men, whereby they must be saved, but only the name of our Lord Jesus Christ*^a. In a word, as the church, with regard to this object of its faith, is termed the one church of Christ; he being the material and the efficient cause of it; so with regard to their doctrine and ministry, who were thus the subordinate and instrumental cause, it is styled the one apostolic church.

Such is the church's unity with respect to its faith and foundation. Next follows that which concerns the carrying up of the structure, ver. 21, *In whom all the building fitly framed together groweth, &c.* This *fit framing*, to which the improvement of the church is attributed, denotes that union of charity and mutual assistance, which, in the parts of a building reciprocally sustaining and sustained by each other, make both the strength and beauty of the house. The argument is farther illustrated in a following chapter to these Ephesians^b, under another metaphor serving to the same purpose. Of which intending to treat more largely hereafter^c, I forbear this part of the allusion now, and proceed to observe the nature, end, and use of this building; signified in those words which affirm it to *grow unto an holy temple in the Lord*, and in him to be *builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit*.

The tabernacle and temple, under the law, were successively types of our blessed Lord and his church, under the gospel. Of our Lord, with regard to his own person; and that, as upon other accounts fre-

^a Acts iv. 12.^b Ch. iv.^c Epistle St. Mark.

quently intimated in the New Testament, so particularly in respect of that Schechinah, or glorious presence of the Divine Majesty, which manifested itself by visible tokens in the sanctuary; but dwelt in the human nature of Christ *fully and bodily*^d. But it farther represented our Lord, considered in conjunction with and as head of his mystical body the church; who have also their part in the figure. Thus every part of the legal sanctuary, being formed and ordered by Divine appointment, denotes the church entirely founded upon, builded in, and finished by God himself. The whole of that, being dedicated to his immediate service, insinuates the holiness required from every *living stone of this spiritual house*^e. The necessity of offering acceptable sacrifices there only, implied that through Christ alone, and by virtue of our relation to him, it is that any man can have any access to the God and Father of the spirits of all flesh^f. The diffusing that glory sometimes in most illustrious manner, so as to fill the whole house; and the constant residence of it there, to assert God's property and peculiar favour; these were lively images of that Spirit and its graces shed upon the Christian church: sometimes in most exuberant bounty, by gifts miraculous, and operations altogether supernatural and amazing; always in those ordinary and sufficient assistances by which believers may be distinguished to be his, and rendered conformable and well-pleasing to their head; as partaking of and acted by his own Spirit, of whose fulness they receive as he sees fit to distribute to them^g. These are, and sundry other particulars might be, properly brought to justify the resemblance and relation between God's material house under the law, and his spiritual one under the gospel. Concerning which I observe farther, from the passage now in hand, that the holiness of this house, or its being a temple, depends altogether upon the concern that the Holy Spirit hath in it. *In whom ye are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit*ⁱ.

Those last words, *through the Spirit*, though in a true sense applicable, and by some applied to the former part, do yet seem much more naturally to belong to the latter part of the verse: and designed to acquaint us, not by what means Christians are built into an house, but how that house so built becomes a temple to the Lord. To the like effect this apostle hath expressed himself elsewhere^k: *Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you? If any man defile the temple of God, him shall God destroy; for the temple of God is holy, which temple ye are.* And again^l: *Know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own? And once more, exposing the absurdity of communicating in heathen rites, he asks, What agreement hath the temple of God with idols? for ye are the temple of the living God; as God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people*^m. The force of all which reasoning lies here: that by the communication of his sanctifying graces God abides in the hearts of Christians; that the peculiar residence of God in any place distinguishes it from those of common use and

^d Col. ii. 9.^e 1 Pet. ii. 4, 5.^f Eph. ii. 18.^g Col. i. 19.^h John i. 16.ⁱ Eph. ii. 22.^k 1 Cor. iii. 16, 17.^l Ch. vi. 19.^m 2 Cor. vi. 16.

esteem, and gives him the sole property in it; that the reason holds equally with spiritual as with the outward and material dwellings of God. And therefore those persons of whom the church of Christ is composed are every one of them as strictly separated to his use, as firmly assorted to be his, by the inhabitation of that Divine Spirit, (which is elsewhere in this Epistle^a emphatically styled *his seal* upon them,) as over the Jewish sanctuary was of old, in which the visible tokens of the Divine Majesty declared his peculiar presence and inviolable right.

From this short illustration of the words in the order they lie before us, it may be of use to make the following remarks:

First, we may learn from hence, as was hinted before, that the church, as that signifies the true mystical body of Christ, is and can be but one. Because the same essential terms of uniting members into it have always been, and always shall continue unalterable, as to the matter and substance, though not as to the measure and circumstances of them. This is the same city, to the privileges whereof men of all ages and places are admitted; this the same house and temple, into which all the living stones are compacted; this the same company of persons, however named or distinguished, before or under the law, and entitled Christian under the gospel. No time, no people is excluded from this society; and therefore the same arguments which prove this church to be *one* do likewise prove it to be *catholic*, or *universal*. From whence again,

Secondly, we may infer that, howsoever we read of several churches in holy writ or elsewhere, these are no other than so many distinct parts of the church, in its most proper and extensive sense. They are all members of this body, all apartments of this great house, all companies in this populous city. And though all these are conveniently considered as separate, with regard to the places where they are situate; the limits of dominion which circumscribe them; the temporal constitutions with which they are incorporate; and the several jurisdictions they have right to exercise; yet still (all difference in those, and any other regards of less importance notwithstanding) they are but one in the main, and can no farther deserve the title of churches than as they agree in all essential parts with the universal church diffused over the face of the whole earth. An obvious image hereof we have both in cities or boroughs in the same kingdom; and also in those societies into which different mysteries or professions are respectively formed within the same city. Their discipline, authority, by-laws, and exemptions have full force upon the members of their own distinct body. But yet all those less are united into one greater and comprehensive body, and all bound to act in subordination and agreement with the fundamental laws of that. The company is included in and controlled by the city; the city or borough by the nation: and as each member of the former is privileged and concluded as a citizen, so is each citizen, as a subject of the state, concluded in matters essential to the constitution of that general society into which the rest are at last all resolved.

^a Eph. iv. 29.

Thirdly, the passage we are upon may serve to instruct us what those essential matters are which make the band of unity in the Christian church.

Of these the first is, an acknowledgment of and belief in Jesus Christ. It is *in him* that we are built up into this holy temple; *in him* that we are framed and grow up; *in him* that we are made partakers of the Spirit, which is the common cement of this building, and constitutes it one, by an union more close and strict than any images taken from sensible objects can fully represent. Nothing can come near it but that which was the cause of it, even the union of our human to his own Divine nature, designed to bring us nearer to him as God, than we, if he had not vouchsafed to become man, could have possibly been. And thus the church is united in the chief corner-stone, their *one Lord*.

The second tie, or band of union, mentioned here, is the doctrine of the apostles and prophets concerning him. This in effect is what we find in Scripture styled, *the form of sound words*^o, *the form of doctrine to which* proselytes at their conversion *were delivered*^p, *the faith once delivered to the saints*^q, and that which, as an ancient father expresses it^r, *the church having received from the apostles and their disciples, though dispersed far and wide, does yet preserve, as though all contained in one house, and embrace alike, as though all had but one heart and one soul*. Less than this will not make us Christians; more than this ought not to be required. And therefore, wheresoever the apostles' doctrine is preserved and maintained, there is the unity of the foundation, that of *one faith*.

3. There is yet a third ligament taken notice of here, the *one Spirit*: of which our Lord himself hath told us, that of it and *water we are born again*, by a birth necessary to our entering into the kingdom of God: and this apostle, that by it *we are all baptized into one body*, that we *have all been made to drink into it*, that we are *adopted, quickened, sanctified, sealed, and joined to the Lord by it*, and that they *who have it not are none of Christ's*^s. This, even when shed forth in extraordinary and miraculous powers, was so far from superseding, as only to evidence the fitness of the persons, and be esteemed a qualification for that sacrament which Christ hath instituted as a federal right of admission into his church^t. And this being conveyed in and by the sacraments, in the ordinary distributions of his grace, doth establish the necessity of that other instance of unity meant by St. Paul, when, in the fourth of this Epistle, to *one Lord* and *one faith* he adds *one baptism*. For men may be believers, but Christians, or members of the church, they are not, till that rite have passed upon them, by which the head of this body commanded all nations to be *disciplined*^u, and made his covenanted people.

These three seem to be essential, and absolutely needful to the constitution of a Christian church. They are marks by which those who are members of it may be plainly discerned from them who are

^o 2 Tim. i. 14. ^p Rom. vi. 17. ^q Jude iii. ^r Iren. l. i. c. 2. ^s John iii. 5; 1 Cor. xii. 13; Rom. viii. 11, 15; 2 Thess. ii. 13; Eph. iv. 20; 1 Cor. vi. 17; Rom. viii. 9.
^t Acts x. 47; xi. 15, 16, 17. ^u Matt. xxviii. 19.

not so : and for that reason, the company who have them are named the visible church. Many other things are requisite to the well-being, the purity and the perfection of the church. But still, grievous errors in opinion, enormous wickedness in practice, horrible corruptions in worship, shameful remissness in discipline, or irregularities in government, notwithstanding, they who hold to the foundation, and have the seal of the covenant, be they single persons or be they societies, must not be denied to be members, though unsound and maimed, impure and even scandalous members, of the one catholic church, as that signifies the visible church of Christ.

But alas ! to such as these that membership is a poor privilege. For it comports with those circumstances of the church only, that render a *vine*, a *net cast into the sea*, a *common field*, and a *threshing-floor*, proper comparisons to represent her. Charity indeed will always think the best, and we must wish and hope for the internal efficacy, where there are the outward means of grace. But what will it profit to hang upon the *vine* an unfruitful branch, whose end is to be cast away and withered and burned ? or to be found in the *net*, when at the same time that the good are gathered into vessels, the bad are sure to be thrown away ? Or how are the tares the better for standing with the wheat, or the chaff for lying among the corn at present ? when a day of distinction is coming, and One who cannot be deceived with forms and false appearances shall separate the one from the other ; gather the grain into his garner, and burn the refuse with fire unquenchable ? Let us not therefore suppose that these, though in profession members of Christ's visible, are yet in truth members of his mystical body. For I think it plain,

Fourthly, that the church intended here by St. Paul is vastly different from that last spoken of, and in the strictest sense the city and dwelling of God^a. It is that which hath fellowship and a denizen right with the saints ; such as none but truly good men can have. For of all others, be their persuasion what it will, it is declared they shall never enter into the kingdom of Christ and of God^b. It is that church which are the household of God^c ; but such are only those servants who cleanse themselves from all filthiness both of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in his fear^d, and those sons who are followers of him as dear children^e. It is that church which is built up in Jesus, and grows into a temple ; but so do only they whose superstructure is answerable to their foundation, a Christian life erected upon a Christian faith. It is that church wherein God dwells by his Spirit ; but such are only they who reverence the Deity within them, keep themselves undefiled members of Christ's body, reckon their persons no longer their own ; but make it their whole business, by all their actions, words, and thoughts, to glorify him to whom they are dedicated^f. This is the church of which such glorious characters are given, to whom such precious promises are made ; the spouse of Christ, all glorious within, without wrinkle and without spot^g ; the noble assembly

^a John xv. 6.^b Matt. xiii. 47—50 ; 37—42 ; iii. 12.^c Eph. ii. 19.^d 1 Cor. vi. 9, 10.^e Ver. 19.^f 2 Cor. vii. 1.^g Eph. v. 1.^h 1 Cor. vi. 19, 20.ⁱ Eph. v. 27.

of the first-born in heaven, and the spirits of just men made perfect, from the beginning of the world to the end ε .

And yet the word *church* is generally meant of that visible body, and with very good reason; because of this body mystical (and to all but God invisible), the means of salvation administered in the visible body are designed to make us. To it by them alone we can be ordinarily brought; in it, by a right use of them, we shall at last certainly be found; and therefore we can never be sufficiently thankful for the precious opportunities we enjoy in the word, the sacraments, the purity of both, (in this best reformed church especially;) never sufficiently fearful of increasing our own condemnation by the neglect or abuse of our religious advantages; never too diligent to possess our *vessels in sanctification and honour^h*, that those bodies be not desecrated by sensual and vile lusts, which God hath chosen to inhabit by the Spirit of holiness. In a word, we can never be too importunate in the prayer made this day by our wise and holy mother, that our *faith in the sight of God may never be reproved*. Which it will as effectually be by a conversation vicious and unworthy of it, as by any doubt or error destructive of it. From all which God in his mercy deliver us, and keep us for ever truly and savingly united to his dear Son; to whom (our Head) with the Father, and blessed Spirit, be all honour and glory, henceforth for evermore. Amen.

THE GOSPEL. St. John xx. 24.

24 *Thomas, one of the twelve, called Didymus, was not with them when Jesus came.*

25 *The other disciples therefore said unto him, We have seen the Lord. But he said unto them, Except I shall see in his hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and thrust my hand into his side, I will not believe.*

26 *And after eight days again his disciples were within, and Thomas with them: then came Jesus, the doors being shut, and stood in the midst, and said, Peace be unto you.*

27 *Then saith he to Thomas, Reach hither thy finger, and behold my hands; and reach hither thy hand, and thrust it into my side: and be not faithless, but believing.*

28 *And Thomas answered and said unto him, My Lord and my God.*

and sensibly convinced, acknowledged that a person able thus to know

24. Thomas (or the twin, for so both Thomas and Didymus signify), one of the

apostles, happened to be absent at that time.

25. This man was so far from believing the report of his brethren, as to declare he would never be persuaded that it was Jesus, without the utmost evidence that all

26, 27. This evidence Jesus vouchsafed to give him: for the next Lord's day (or first of the following week) he came to them again as before, ver. 19. (See the Comment on Gospel for the first Sunday after Easter), and after the usual salutation said to Thomas—

28. He being thus accosted in his own words,

^ε Heb. xii. 23.

^h 1 Thess. iv. 4.

his words and thoughts, and to raise himself from the dead, must needs be his very Master Jesus, and very God.

29 *Jesus saith unto him, Thomas, because thou hast seen me, thou hast believed: blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed.* 29. To which our Lord replied to this effect: How small commendation is due to this faith of thine, which

yielded to that sight and feeling that leave no room for doubt to any who will trust their own senses, in comparison of theirs, who shall assent to truths, in reason credible, though such as neither are nor can be in this manner demonstrated to them!

30 *And many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book:* 30, 31. And this belief (viz. of Jesus being the Messiah, and only begotten Son

31 *But these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name.* of God) the miracles related in this Gospel will be (it is hoped) sufficient to produce; though these that are told

be in number far short of those which Jesus had really wrought.

COMMENT.

IN the scripture now before us there are three things especially which require our consideration:

I. The first is, Thomas his unbelief.

II. The second, the means made use of for removing it.

III. The third, the efficacy and success of those means. To these I shall speak particularly, and endeavour to render them as useful as I can by drawing proper reflections and inferences from each of them, as it shall come in order before me.

I. I begin with Thomas his unbelief. By which hard term far be it from me to insinuate that this apostle's dissatisfaction proceeded from affected or hardened infidelity. Had the case stood thus, God would most probably have forsaken him in it. The Scriptures nowhere (that I know of) furnishing an example of particular and extraordinary measures afforded for the conviction of such men as had wilfully and resolutely set themselves against the truth. But the gentlest thing we can say of the instance now in hand is, that it discovered weakness to a very high degree, and a hardness to be persuaded, which (in an apostle especially) must needs deserve great blame. A resurrection from the dead, it is confessed, was new and strange: an event which the generality of mankind held altogether incredible. But in the case of Jesus, and the circumstances of Thomas, the disbelief of it seems incapable of excuse. The ancient prophecies concerning the Messiah had spoken so fully to this point—*That thus it behoved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day*¹; that our Lord, in his conversation with the two travellers to Emmaus, charges them with *folly and slowness of heart*, for not being convinced upon this testimony alone. He had frequently, during his abode upon earth, given the apostles warning of it. He had told the Jews that whenever they should *destroy*

¹ Luke xxiv. 46, 47.

the temple of his body, in the compass of three days he would set it up again^k. He never mentioned the sufferings appointed for him to accomplish at Jerusalem, without remembering to close that melancholy subject with the comfortable promise of returning to life again^l. That thus he ought, and thus he intended to do, no doubt could remain: and that this promise, great and surprising though it were, was yet possible to him, Thomas might well be satisfied. He might be so from the other miracles which he saw daily wrought by him^m; by the reviving of Jairus's daughterⁿ, which he could not but know: but especially from the raising of Lazarus, of which himself was an eyewitness^o. And indeed that wonder seems to have been reserved to the conclusion of our Saviour's life, that it might both crown all that went before, and, by being fresh in the memories of men, smooth the way for belief of his own resurrection, which came to pass within the space of very few days after.

What more now could be expected in reason, but competent evidence that a thing so often promised, so clearly foretold, a thing of which Jesus had proved himself so capable, was actually performed? And was this wanting? Had he not the testimony of the woman *at the sepulchre, who saw the vision of angels*^p? Had he not Mary Magdalene, who saw our Lord himself^q? Had he not the two travellers, who heard him discourse, and saw him break bread^r? Nay, had he not the concurring unanimous assertions of his *ten brethren*, recounting to him all the passages of our Saviour's appearance to them^s? (For so no doubt they did at large, though it was not necessary for St. John's purpose here to say more than that they told him *they had seen the Lord*.) Were those persons likely, were they under any temptation to deceive him? And was it not altogether as extravagant an imagination to suppose they could be deceived themselves? Was not their long and intimate acquaintance with Jesus sufficient to distinguish his from any other person? And was there not abundant care taken to satisfy them that this was no airy form in his shape, by having his *hands and his feet, his flesh and bones* handled, by eating with them and talking to them^t? Did not his very discourse speak him what he was? The calling his own former sayings to remembrance, the opening their understandings, the expounding and arguing out of Scripture, did they not all savour of that peculiar authority with which he always taught? And the *breathing* upon them^u, giving them the Holy Ghost, and commission to preach and act in his name and his Father's, were characters as plain that this person was their own Master, the very Christ of God.

These were such arguments as the generality of believers in after-ages have rested upon; whom our Saviour pronounces *blessed*^x, for not refusing their assent to that which they did not, could not see. And therefore when Thomas insisted upon sensible demonstration, it is no wrong done to the virtues of that apostle to call this unbelief: but justice requires that we should both condemn him and admire his

^k John ii. 19, 21.

^l Matt. xvi. 21; xvii. 23; xx. 19.

^m Matt. viii. 26.

ⁿ Luke viii. 49.

^o John xi.

^p Luke xxiv. 9.

^q John xx. 18.

^r Luke xxiv. 33.

^s John xi. 25.

^t Luke xxiv. 39, 40.

^u John xx. 22.

^x John xx. 29.

Master. That Master, who, when he indulged his weakness so far as to satisfy his grossest senses, did not do this because the former evidences of himself had been insufficient, or to warrant the rejection of them in others; but out of infinite goodness, and particular condescension to the present stupidity of this unpersuaded man; and for other excellent reasons, of which I shall have occasion to say something more by and by.

In the mean while I would be glad to improve this first particular, by desiring that what hath been said upon it may be fixed upon men's minds with these reflections:

I. First, that men would observe the immediate occasion of St. Thomas his falling into this unbelief; which was his absence from the rest of the apostles when Christ appeared to them. It seems most likely that those assemblies, held secretly for fear of the Jews, were always employed to religious purposes. And from the advantage Thomas lost by not being there, we may and ought to take warning against the neglect of God's public worship. It is in his own house, and in the congregations of the faithful, that Christ exhibits himself. There we are to expect the enlightening of our minds, the purifying our affections, the convictions of his truth, the assistance of his grace; for the giving us a right understanding of our duty, and for the disposing us to practise it when we do understand it. These are the means of growing in goodness which God hath ordained; and it is usual and just with him to suffer their virtues to fade and wither and perish, who will not come hither for strength and refreshment. How many have been lost for not seeking God where he may be found! What numbers of souls lie now tormented in hell, whose first step towards ruin was their not frequenting the church, slighting the prayers and sermons and sacraments and other mighty helps and comforts which might have been had in this place! Had Thomas been with his brethren, he probably had been satisfied as soon and as easily as they. O let this then prevail with men to be constant comers to the house of God, lest they, like him, fall into unbelief, and, by a wilful neglect of ordinary means, lose all pretensions to their own happiness. When sloth, or contempt, or a light indisposition, or a pretence of business tempts you to be absent, think with yourself, It may be, God this day may by his minister tell me some necessary thing which I knew not before: it may be, he may drive some powerful exhortation home upon my conscience, which may make me a better man ever after; it may be, some lurking sin may be discovered, or some domineering lust subdued, by the advices prepared for me at this very time; it may be, my zeal, my devotion, my charity may be inflamed by joining in prayer with my fellow-Christians. But why do I say it may be? For some of these certainly will be. God hath commanded his blessing to wait at his own house; and no man ever came hither as he ought, but he went back better than he came; no man ever prayed or heard in public with a true Christian temper of soul, who prayed or heard in vain. But either his own or some other's condition was the safer and better for it. This is the only place that sends no good man empty away. And they who die for want of

spiritual food, are only such as have no appetite, and take no pains to be fed. On the other hand, can it be thought strange that God should suffer such to perish for hunger as obstinately and wilfully starve themselves? Why may we not expect that those who despise him, he will despise? And accordingly we see that the beginning of profaneness and shameless vice commonly centres here. Men first neglect, then are ashamed and afraid to come hither for the awakening their consciences; and so by degrees they fall into desperate hardness of heart. The reasons and the truth whereof I might lay before you past all dispute. But at present I shall only refer you to this one argument; that of all the vile wretches whom murder and robbery, and other scandalous crimes, bring to a public and shameful death, there are scarce any who die with any sense and confession of their sins, but acknowledge that absenting themselves from the public worship was the cursed beginning of all their profligate conversation. Such testimony does every gaol and every gibbet bear to that method of God's dealing with mankind—that *when people will not hear his voice, nor endure his reproofs, he gives them up to their own hearts' lusts, and lets them follow their own imaginations*. But God will love them that love him, and they that seek him early (that is, diligently and constantly) shall be sure to find him*.

Secondly, from the instance before us I would briefly take notice what benefits and uses are to be made of the faults and failings of eminent persons recorded in Scripture. When these apostles do so freely and fully transmit to all future ages such blots as the denial of St. Peter, the unbelief of St. Thomas, the fears and cowardice and heaviness of all their brethren; this may satisfy us that they were men of integrity; that it was not their study to magnify themselves, or impose upon the world, or to promote any thing but the very truth. For a private design would have tempted them to disguise and excuse and conceal any blemishes in their own characters. And therefore this frankness is a great motive to our belief of their writings; since them, who would not dissemble, when their own credit lay at stake, we have no reason to suppose false in other matters.

Again, these spots in the very saints themselves teach us that no mere man whatsoever is in all points so perfect that we should rest upon his example, or blindly make his behaviour the rule of our own; that the law of God is the only true standard of our actions; and that even the best of men, when weighed in this balance, have been found wanting. Consequently, that this consideration should make us humble and meek; especially since most of us have so unequal a mixture, so many more and greater vices, for an allay and embasement to our so many less and fewer virtues. It is an argument of great vanity for any man to say he would not have fallen with David, or have foresworn Christ with St. Peter, or the like. Alas! we are but little acquainted with their circumstances, the violence of their temptations, or the infirmities of human nature in general; and least of all with our own; who perhaps fall, if not so deep or so notoriously, yet more frequently, and upon less provocations to sin; and whose

sins, though they be more, yet our relentings for them are slighter, and our repentance infinitely less exemplary than theirs.

And therefore, lastly, this should inspire great tenderness and caution, how we presume to censure and judge others; but above all, it should hinder our taking upon us to determine any thing concerning their spiritual and future state upon the account of any very ill action, which appears to us, or which in reality hath been done by them. For if prophets, if apostles, if other shining lights, who are now so many *sons in the kingdom of heaven*, have had these misfortunes; and yet, by the grace of God and their own better consideration, have recovered their station, and come forth, like the morning light, with double lustre, after darkness and error; who are we, that we should set bounds to the grace of God, or despair even of the worst of our brethren? He can raise them that have been long *dead in trespasses and sins* to a life of righteousness and immortal hope: and our duty is to wish and pray that he would do so; and to contribute ourselves the utmost in our power towards the furthering and preparing sinners for the workings of Divine grace. Now this is best to be done by methods of meekness and kindness and longsuffering; by winning them over to a better sense, and patiently contending with them for their good. Whatever severity and rigour is necessary in these cases, that is the business of authority and a public act. But all that private Christians have to do is to love and to admonish; to persuade and to treat bad men courteously; to watch favourable opportunities of doing them service, and not presently to give over if they perceive no improvement; to allow time for cool and sober thoughts, and to accommodate, as much as may be, ourselves and our arguments to the disposition of the persons we have to deal with. All these things, as they naturally offer themselves upon the contemplation of good men's failings in general, so do they more particularly from the pattern now before us. For here we find the apostles eager in informing their absent brother of the Lord's resurrection, and yet patient towards him, though their testimony was despised. Nay, notwithstanding this obstinate dissent from them in so material a point, and the reflection this dissent might cast upon their wisdom or their integrity; as if they had been false or credulous and easy to a fault; yet he was suffered to continue, and was found in their friendship and their company at our Saviour's next visit: which was indeed a visit of compassion to this positive mistaken man. And the mention of that brings me to my second head.

II. The means used for convincing Thomas, and removing his unbelief. Now these were the very same himself had desired. For though our Lord express it by—*Behold my hands*; yet *seeing* and *beholding* are often used with regard to perfect and distinct perception, by the mediation of whichsoever of our senses that knowledge is conveyed to us. There seems therefore little doubt to be made but Thomas used all those methods for his own conviction which our Lord intended to afford. That he contented not himself with the view only of Christ's crucified body, the marks and scars of the wounds he received upon the cross; but that he handled and searched

them, and employed all the evidence of his several senses. This was fit, if not to remove all remains of unbelief and doubting, yet in obedience to his Master, who had taken him at his word, and determined thus to convince all that should hereafter dispute the reality of his resurrection, that that was not capable of any sort of proof which had not been already given of it. For how could the most cavilling infidel expect or ask more than to see and handle the body of Jesus, to be assured, not only that it was a true body, but that it was the very same, and could be no other body than that which had been wounded and expired upon the cross? This is all that could possibly be required for the proof of our Saviour's rising from the dead; and this is such a proof as must in reason be supposed to take away the very jealousy of delusion and deceit. Since then the means of removing Thomas his unbelief were so very proper, and so fully answered their purpose, nothing more is necessary upon this head than only to leave it with a reflection or two, which naturally offer themselves, and are fit to be attended to upon this occasion.

Now, first, we may assure ourselves from this passage that whatsoever changes our Saviour's glorified body might undergo after his resurrection, yet it was not altered as to the properties of a body; but still such as the senses of men were competent judges of. To these senses it is that our Lord appeals: by these he composes the terrified disciples who feared a phantom; by these he satisfies the doubtful and incredulous; by these the apostles make it their business to persuade the world: affirming that they had *eaten and drunk with him*^a, had seen and heard him, and that they went upon sure grounds, having several such demonstrations as they could not possibly be deceived in. But if the body of our Saviour be not subject to the same laws with all other corporeal substances; if it may be where our senses can discern nothing of it, though no other body can be so; then what satisfaction had Thomas by this indulgence of our Lord? Why should he lay aside his scruples for the seeing and touching that body which our senses may be, and are very often deceived in? How poor an argument was that of St. John^b that he declared to his proselytes—*That which he had seen and heard, and his hands had handled of the word of life*; if neither eyes, nor ears, nor hands are to be trusted in their judgment of this matter, nor can with any safety or piety be depended upon!

2. But secondly, let us, upon this occasion, observe and admire the marvellous love and condescension of our blessed Saviour, who stooped to the infirmities of one doubting disciple, and would not give him over to his unbelief, though that unbelief were most unreasonable. He had (as I have taken notice before) convinced the rest of the apostles sufficiently; and their testimony ought to have convinced Thomas as his afterwards did them who believed through his preaching. The demanding to have one's senses satisfied in every article of faith is a thing most unreasonable. None but they who lived whilst Christ was in the flesh, and of them again, none but those few who had opportunities of seeing and conversing with him, were capable of

^a Acts x. 41.^b John i. 1.

such methods. And how very inconsiderable a number are these in comparison of the multitudes that must needs want them ! Upon such terms the Christian religion could have been but of one age's continuance at most ; and even in that age it must be very far from being entertained by the generality of mankind. So that there was reason enough to have denied Thomas the satisfaction he insisted upon. But yet we see this Good Shepherd sought and found his lost and wandering sheep ; and by so doing he hath assured us it is not his will that any of his little ones should perish. The state of glory and immortality upon which Christ is now entered, though very different from that humble guise of flesh and blood in which he dwelt among men, hath yet made no difference in him. His dispositions are the same, his mercy and tender affection the same, the yearnings of his bowels over wretched mortals the same, and his compassion for their weaknesses and sufferings the same, in the midst of majesty and bliss unconceivable, as when himself felt and endured the frailties and poverty, and other afflictions of human nature. So justly may we all apply to ourselves that comfort of St. Paul^c—*We have not an high priest that cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities, and may therefore come boldly to the throne of grace for the obtaining mercy.* His height and greatness does not render him disdainful and difficult of access : the distance of his dwelling sets him not far off, that we should not be able to reach him with our prayers. But he is still the same loving Jesus, hath still a tender concern for poor sinners and weak Christians. And therefore approach him, all ye humble and contrite ones, with reverence and a holy hope. For he will enlighten your understandings, and give liberally that knowledge which is necessary for your salvation : he will strengthen your feeble knees, restore your lame and withered hands, and enable the willing to do his work, and to walk in his way : he will not break the bruised reed, nor quench the smoking flax ; but comfort the broken-hearted, and encourage the beginnings and imperfect essays of goodness. In a word, to all them that err or are hindered out of infirmity, and not out of perverseness, he will be a mighty and a merciful Saviour. Like this apostle in my text, they shall be pitied and cherished and settled in the truth, and *find grace and help in time of need*^d. But,

3. Thirdly, we must take care to understand this favour to Thomas aright, so as not to be led into false expectations from it. For though every Christian may upon this example build a sound hope of all necessary grace, and of the good intentions of our kind Saviour to all his weak and wandering ones ; yet there is no foundation at all in it for those men's depending upon some sensible demonstration, or miraculous methods of conviction, who pretend to be dissatisfied in the faith at this time of day. The reason is, because these evidences are not nor can be needful now ; and consequently they come not within the compass of necessary grace. I have shown indeed that the satisfaction Thomas was allowed was not strictly necessary ; because he might and ought to have been satisfied without it ; and more is not necessary than what is sufficient. But if our Lord, in particular

^c Heb. iv. 15, 16.^d Heb. iv. 16.

condescension and indulgence to the infirmities of one disciple, be better than his word, and afford an extraordinary favour, this gives no right, no claim to the rest. They can only be sure of stated and ordinary means, and have all the reason in the world to be contented with them.

Besides, there can never be the same motives, the same occasion to incline God's mercy to any particular person who lives under the dispensation of the gospel now, as there was for this manifestation to Thomas. It might indeed be urged before, that our Lord had not yet given all the proofs of his resurrection that the thing was capable of. But when here every sense was appealed to, and all concurred in their verdict; when nothing was left unasked that the most sceptical doubter could pretend to desire; when the very apostles themselves had one of their number that held out a while, and they preached not this doctrine till his scruples were removed; when even this doubter himself was no less vigorous and positive afterwards in asserting the truth of a point which nothing but demonstration could make him believe: this takes off all imputation of credulity and easiness; this shews that, as these disciples could have no temptation to deceive others, so they went upon sure grounds, they took all possible care that they might not be, and they durst be confident that they were not, could not be deceived themselves. All which, as it might well justify the church's saying, *that God in his wisdom suffered Thomas to doubt for the more confirmation of the faith*, (Christian religion gaining some advantages by these doubts which we do not see how it could have had without them,) so it certainly renders the doubts of others much more inexcusable. For whatever objections can be now pretended, they have been answered and baffled already. If ever demonstration was necessary, it was necessary but once. This disciple doubted, and was satisfied for us all; and his former unbelief adds such strength to the cause he pleads, and makes him a witness so much above exception, that the scruples which in him were weakness, in those that follow him and know his story, will be wilfulness and resolved infidelity. Consequently, no other man's circumstances admitting of the same alleviations which those of Thomas did, no other man can be equally an object of compassion for his unbelief, or reasonably hope that God will condescend to use the like extraordinary methods to convert and persuade him to the truth.

Thus what in Thomas might appear to be want of evidence will be found in modern unbelievers to be want of good disposition. And how great a hand the mind and will of a man have in his believing or rejecting the truth, our blessed Lord^f has given us an occasion to consider in those words to St. Thomas, *Be not faithless, but believing*. It seems by this that the very sight and feeling of Christ's body, the particular proving those wounds received upon the cross, the finger in the print of the nails, and the hand in the side which the spear had pierced, had not superseded all occasion for this advice. Nor is this the only intimation given us in Scripture that evidence of sense itself will not always convince; but that after the utmost proof has been

^e See Collect for the day.

^f John xx. 27.

made that any, even the most sceptical man can wish, it is not impossible for a corrupt and perverse mind not to believe even yet. Of such perverseness the apostle of this day was manifestly innocent; for no sooner were the difficulties he had formed to himself concerning a true and proper resurrection satisfied according to his desire, but he surrendered immediately. And though slower in assenting to it, yet was he more lofty and noble in the manner of acknowledging it than any of his brethren. Which leads me to the

3. Third, and last head. The success of the means used by our Lord for removing Thomas his unbelief, expressed in the twenty-eighth verse, *And Thomas answered and said, My Lord and my God.* I call this the noblest confession; because the catholic interpreters of Scripture have understood by it, that St. Thomas did not only recognise Jesus for the Messiah, the very same Lord to whom he had been a servant and companion during the space of his ministry, but that he moreover owned his Divine nature, and drew the consequence to himself which St. Paul did afterwards to the Romans, *that the resurrection of Jesus from the dead, and the power he exerted in it, did abundantly declare him to be the very Son of God.* Accordingly the original here is in terms most strict, and with that addition of the Greek article, which the very heretics and enemies of the truth confess to be a character of the word *God*, being taken in its proper and natural sense, and intended of the *only true God*. And indeed when they go about to make these words a note of admiration only, they do not leave them a sufficient force for expressing Thomas his conviction. For expressions of wonder, though they properly speak astonishment and surprise, yet they do not always imply belief; and may therefore import the strangeness without inferring the truth of the thing. But our Lord (you see in the next words) accepts this as a full and sufficient declaration of assent: *Thomas, because thou hast seen me, thou hast believed.* And to make it thus, we must allow that paraphrase which some ancient translations supply it with, by reading, *Thou art my Lord, thou art my God.* Which is but in effect to say, what our Saviour had before pronounced concerning himself, that the truth of those declarations was now apparent—*Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.—No man taketh my life from me, but I lay it down of myself; I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again*^b. Now no mere man can do these things: none but God can have that power. So mighty, so sudden a change do we find in this apostle, that the person whom so lately he could not be prevailed upon to think otherwise of than as a dead man, lost to all hopes, all possibility of returning, he now adores and admires as the almighty and the everliving God.

From hence let every disciple of Jesus learn to contemplate with all becoming reverence this resurrection of our Lord, and adore the glories and the wonders of him and it. Let us take all possible care to confirm ourselves in the assured belief of it, and of all other mysteries of the Christian faith. Let us observe and be thankful for the wisdom and goodness of our God and Saviour; who converted the failings

of an eminent servant to such excellent advantage, that not only his own mind, like a broken bone well set, was better established from his own doubts; but that gainsayers should be more effectually put to silence by them, and out of his weakness all succeeding believers should be made strong. Let us again, with St. Thomas, be ready to lay aside our scruples upon sufficient conviction; and zealous to make some amends by our after-acts, for any offence which those scruples might have given while we entertained them. Above all, let us beg the grace and assistance of the Holy Spirit of God, to keep us always in that sincere, teachable, meek disposition of soul: and likewise in that due regard and observance of all those virtues and good works agreeable to the principles we profess, *that our faith in his sight may never be reproved*. But that from a perfect and active belief in his Son Jesus Christ here, we may be at length received to the sight and ravishing enjoyment of him; and be and live and reign with our dear Lord for ever in the heavens. Which God of his infinite mercy grant for the same Jesus Christ's sake. To whom, &c. Amen.

THE CONVERSION OF ST. PAUL.

An account of St. Paul.

ST. PAUL (as himself informs us^a) was of the tribe of Benjamin, and a citizen of Tarsus in Cilicia. A place which, for healthful situation, good building, and, to omit other its excellencies, the fame of its university, might with good reason claim that title which her denizen gives, that of *no mean city*. We have not any account of St. Paul's relations; St. Jerome^b makes them to have been inhabitants of Giscala in Judea, and to remove to Tarsus after the birth of this son. In that city he was trained up, and had the usual accomplishments of an university, the knowledge of philosophy, and other liberal sciences. His father, being a Pharisee, took care that he might upon this foundation proceed to the building a fair superstructure of divine learning, and the knowledge of the Mosaic rites and ceremonies. Which the better to effect, he was a scholar of Gamaliel^c, a person celebrated for wisdom and authority above most of the then members of his sect.

Of these Pharisees, and their zeal, some account hath been formerly given^d. What influence this education had on St. Paul, the following discourses on this day will shew. To which my reader is referred for that part also of his story which relates to his miraculous conversion, and the no less vigorous effort of his better directed zeal for the advancement of the Christian faith. This began immediately to appear, by entering publicly into the service of it, by retiring out of Damascus, and becoming the first preacher of the gospel in Arabia Petrea^e. From whence, after two years, he returned to Damascus,

^a Phil. iii. 5; Acts xxi. 39.

for the eleventh Sunday after Trinity.

^b Catal. de Script. Eccl.

^c Gal. i. 17.

^d Acts xxii. 3.

^e Gospel

and preached Christ publicly in the synagogue there. The malice of the Jews, being incensed for having lost so considerable a champion, pursued him close^f. They contrived all possible means to dispatch him; and, after many other stratagems in vain, made their request to the governor under Aretas king of Arabia Petraea (into whose hands, by the defeat of Herod's army, that city had now fallen) that he would gratify them in his destruction. The gates were day and night guarded, to prevent his escape, but the disciples let him down over the city wall in a basket; which place is still said to be shewed to travellers, near a gate called St. Paul's gate. After three years from his conversion, he went up to Jerusalem to see Peter^g; who about this time returned from confirming the Samaritan converts. His conversion being made known by Barnabas, he was, after some fear and scruples, received by the apostles and disciples, and had the right hand of fellowship given him by them after fifteen days' stay with Peter^h. In this time the Grecians, against whom he disputed, endeavoured to kill himⁱ. But the brethren sent him away for Cæsarea and Tarsus. He preached in Syria and Cilicia^k; and, after two years' labour in those regions, returning again to Tarsus, he was fetched by Barnabas to Antioch, there to assist him in the conversion and confirmation of that city^l. Here it was that they first obtained that honourable title of Christians; of which more hereafter^m.

It is observable, that in all this time St. Paul had declined, as much as was possible, every place where any Christian churches were begun. Of which the reason given to the Galatians isⁿ, that he might not be thought to receive his instruction from men, but by revelation from Christ himself. Therefore, even when in the neighbourhood so long, he went not of his own accord to Antioch. But now, after a year's stay there, the Christians made choice of him and Barnabas to convey the charity of the converts to the brethren at Jerusalem^o, upon intimation of the great famine which shortly after afflicted those parts. (This journey is not mentioned in the Epistle to the Galatians.) From hence they returned to Antioch again, and brought with them Mark^p. Here the Holy Ghost separated them for the work of the gospel^q. About this time St. Paul is thought to have been caught up to heaven^r. Leaving that city, they came first to Seleucia, then to Cyprus, and preached particularly at Salamis^s. Afterwards at Paphos, where they found the proprætor Sergius Paulus, a prudent man, and one that, after good deliberation, received the faith. A conversion chiefly occasioned by the judgment of God, which, immediately upon St. Paul's words, fell upon Elymas the sorcerer, who strove to pervert the proconsul. From this conquest our apostle is by many affirmed to have had the surname of Paul^t. Not unlike to the Roman custom of giving new names after remarkable victories. Though by some it is thought to have been imposed with his other name; it being the custom to do so, and the former

^f Acts ix. 22—25; 1 Cor. xi. 32, 33. ^g Gal. i. 18. ^h Acts ix. 26, 27. ⁱ Ver. 29, 30.
^k Gal. i. 21. ^l Acts xi. 25, 26. ^m Epist. for St. Barnabas' day. ⁿ Gal. i. 15—24.
^o Acts xi. 26—30. ^p Acts xii. 25. ^q Acts xiii. 2. ^r 2 Cor. xii. 2, 3, 4. ^s Acts
xiii. 4—12. ^t Hieron. Catal. Script.

opinion ill consisting with the exemplary humility of the person. Hence they went to Perga in Pamphylia, (where John Mark left them,) and afterwards to Antioch in Pisidia^a. Here, after a long and eloquent sermon made by St. Paul, the Jews, envious at their good reception, raised a tumult in the city; applied themselves to the honourable women chiefly, and by their means forced the apostles' departure to Iconium; and, after some stay here, their malice pursuing them thither also, caused them to hasten to Lystra. Here, by an eminent miracle performed upon a cripple, the people were so transported as to think them gods^x. Bringing therefore sacrifices, they would needs have honoured them therewith; calling Paul, as chief speaker, Mercury; and Barnabas, perhaps for his age and gravity, Jupiter. They knew and believed that there was a divine power manifested in these miracles, but applied it to the instruments, not the author. The perverse spite of the Jews followed them again hither; and did so alter the people's sentiments, that the very person whom but even now they would have adored with the most humble prostrations, they now drag out of the city, and stone. Being left therefore for dead, when the disciples came, probably to inter his body, he rose up, went back into the city for that night, and the next day followed Barnabas to Derbey. Whence, after conversion of multitudes, they returned to Lystra, and the rest of the cities forementioned, confirming them in the doctrine they had lately received, and ordaining elders in every church. Then returning through Pisidia and Pamphylia, after preaching again at Perga, they went down into Attalia^z. From thence at last they came to Antioch, staying with the rest of the disciples of that place a considerable time, full of joy and thanks for the success of their ministry. During their abode in this city rose that dissension, concerning the necessity or indifference of observing the Mosaic rites, which gave occasion to the great synod at Jerusalem^a. The proselytes therefore, desiring to be well satisfied, and go upon sure grounds; as also the humility of Paul and his fellow-labourers, being not content to rely upon their own judgments in this affair; it was proposed that the decision of this question might be referred to the general assembly of apostles at Jerusalem. Paul and Barnabas carried the message; whose coming caused great joy among the disciples and converts throughout Phœnicia and Samaria, as well as at Jerusalem; and the success their preaching had among the Gentiles seemed a good argument of God's approving the Gentiles' faith, although uncircumcised. This is the journey to Jerusalem mentioned in the second to the Galatians, ver. 1. The event of all was, that the Gentiles should be obliged to no more observances than those who are generally called proselytes of the gates; which consisted chiefly in the seven precepts of the sons of Noah. Paul therefore and Barnabas were dispatched to Antioch with the decrees of the council^b. Whither shortly after Peter also came; at which time happened the sharp contest between him and St. Paul, mentioned hereafter in St. Peter's life^c.

^a Acts xiii. 13, 14—50, 51. ^x Acts xiv. 2—18. ^y Acts xiv. 19—23. ^z Ver. 24—28.
^a Act. xv. 1—29. ^b Acts xv. 30. ^c Gal. ii. 11—14.

Judas and Silas (called elsewhere Silvanus) were by the apostles sent to accompany Paul and Barnabas to Antioch^d. The former returned to Jerusalem; but the latter, willing to continue with St. Paul, was by him chosen a companion of his travels. For now they were preparing for a fresh expedition; upon which Barnabas, in a quarrel concerning Mark, left Paul, and betook himself into his native island Cyprus^e. St. Paul, after he had been recommended to the blessing and assistance of God by the prayers of the church, makes a visit to the several places where he had planted Christianity. Going therefore to Syria and Cilicia^f, hence, as is most probably conjectured it was, and about this time, that he passed over into Crete. But not being permitted to stay there long, he constituted Titus bishop of that place, whom he had taken with him instead of Mark, when he, leaving them, went from the work at Perga.

Afterwards he returned to Derbe and Lystra^g, where he met with Timothy; who, by his innocency of life and conversation, had obtained a good report of the brethren there. And being by his education, and especially his knowledge of the Scriptures, qualified for that employment^h, St. Paul took him as his coadjutor in the propagation of Christianity. But willing, in ceremonies and indifferent customs, rather to conform to persons of a contrary persuasion, than by punctually asserting his privilege uncharitably to cause dissensions and widen breaches, that he might not give offence to the Jews in those parts, he circumcised Timothy, who was now his fellow-traveller through Galatia and Phrygiaⁱ. They would have continued their journey as far as Asia, but were by God diverted^k. Being come therefore to Mysia, and attempting in vain to go over into Bithynia, they came to Troas; where St. Luke seems to have joined him. From hence Paul by a vision was directed into Macedonia. At Philippi they had great influence upon their auditors, more particularly one Lydia, a seller of purple, who entertained them during their abode in that city. Here happened to be a maid possessed with a devil, who by divination had brought her masters considerable gains^l. She, meeting Paul and his companions, as they went to one of the *proseuchæ* or oratories, declared them to be, as indeed they were, the servants of the most high God, and preachers of the way to salvation. He, well knowing that Christ's religion needed not the testimony of hell to confirm it, (though it can extort even that,) by healing the demoniac, and taking away the cause from whence her masters received their dear gains, was presently assaulted by the enraged people. They were not more ready to execute than their magistrates were to give an unjust sentence. Therefore, after a severe scourging, and other barbarous indignities, they cast the apostles, though unconvicted, into prison: and, not content with confining them there, the dungeon and stocks were appointed for their portion. Their vain malice was presently defeated by an earthquake, which opened all the prison doors, and a sudden light, which conveyed joy and praise into

^d 2 Cor. i. 19; 1 Thess. i. 1; 2 Thess. i. 1.

^e Acts xv. 36—40.

^f Ver. 41.

^g Acts xvi. 1, 2. ^h See 2 Tim. i. 5. and iii. 14, 15.

ⁱ Acts xvi. 3—6.

^k Ver. 7—10.

^l Ver. 12—28.

the apostles' hearts, in the midst of darkness and iron. The fright drove the gaoler to despair, and had made him prevent the sentence which would ensue upon the prisoners' escape by self-murder, had not Paul assured him of their yet being safe in custody. He, who was now their captive, with all the offices of courtesy and gentleness, soon changed his former disposition, gave such evident proofs of faith and repentance as to be baptized, and brought his whole family over proselytes to this persecuted religion^m. The magistrates next morning would have dismissed the apostles, but St. Paulⁿ, willing to shew them how great their injustice had been towards him, and what dangers themselves were become liable to by offering violence upon denizens of Rome, did not accept of the discharge, till they had first made acknowledgment and public recantation of this their fact. Which done, St. Paul, after some conference with the converts at Lydia's house, departed.

Hence he passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia, and came to Thessalonica, the metropolis of Macedonia^o; where he disputed in the synagogues of the Jews, mightily convincing them of the truth of his doctrine. Their restless malice raised a commotion, and, for want of the apostles, wreaked itself upon their landlord Jason; who, upon security for his good behaviour, was dismissed; and Paul and Silas were by the brethren (fearing greater disturbances and dangers) conveyed by night to Bercea. Here their preaching met with good success, the persons being such as are fittest for its reception. For neither did their obstinacy make them, like the Jews, deaf to this new doctrine, nor a temper too credulous and easy incline them to embrace any thing that was not well weighed and very rational. And indeed Christian religion is so reasonable an institution, that no man can be so well persuaded of nor adhere with so great satisfaction to it, as he who grounds his faith upon sound reason. Hence also the Thessalonian Jews forced them to retire; wherefore Paul was sent privily to Athens, leaving the rest of his company with orders to follow him thither speedily. From thence he sent Timothy to Thessalonica^p, and, whilst he was here alone, for his diversion probably, and to satisfy his curiosity, he went about to several parts of the city to see the rarities of it. He found abundance of superstition and ignorant zeal for themselves knew not what deities^q; the Athenians being, by their own authors, as well as St. Luke in this place, noted for great lovers of variety and novelty. Which temper shewed itself in nothing more eminently than the greedy entertaining of any upstart religion. St. Paul, perceiving the miserable condition of the inhabitants, thought this a fit place and time for him to apply himself to the discharge of his great work, and to try if the true religion might find as favourable an acceptance at their hands as so many false and absurd opinions had formerly done. But alas! he was sure to find considerable opposition when preaching doctrines so vastly different, and almost contrary, to whatever they had before been taught. The Stoics' pride could never bend to a Christian humility;

^m Ver. 29—34.ⁿ Ver. 35—40.^o Acts xvii. 1—12.^p 1 Thess. iii. 1, 2.^q Acts xvii. 16—33.

nor the Epicureans' lusts endure a sober and severe life; nor their interest admit of a resurrection and judgment after this life. They therefore encounter him, and affording him no better terms than that of *babbler* and a *setter forth of strange gods*, (supposing possibly *anastasis*, or the resurrection, to be some new and as yet unheard of deity,) bring him before the senate at Areopagus.

Here, in a most excellent discourse, he endeavoured to convince them of their present errors and delusions; and to inform them who that true God was, whom they, under false notions, blindly worshipped. This he enforced by arguments out of their own poets, shewing them how near and easy to be found He was by every one that would feel after Him. That this is the very Person whom they addressed themselves to by the name of *ἄγνωτος Θεός*, or *Unknown God*. They counted it a prerogative of the Divine Majesty to give men but faint glimpses into the nature of itself; and accordingly we are told, that Ammon, or Amun, the great Egyptian deity, signifies *hidden*: and thus Isaiah himself calls the God of his people; *Verily thou art a God that hidest thyself, O God of Israel, the Saviour*^r. His discourse to this senate had notwithstanding some effect; and particularly upon Dionysius^s, of whom it will not be amiss to take this short account.

He is said in his youth to have travelled into Egypt, there to study astronomy; in which science that country was excellent^t. Together with him one Apollophanes, a famous rhetorician of that age, was at Heliopolis in Egypt at the time of our Saviour's crucifixion. Dionysius, astonished at the miraculous and altogether preternatural eclipse of the sun, which then happened, is said to have broke out into this expression, That certainly at that time God himself suffered, or was much concerned for somebody that did. He, after his return, and conversion by St. Paul, being upbraided by this his former companion for revolting from his principles, reproaching him that he treacherously used the weapons of Athens against herself, her learning to confute her false religion, replied, that this accuser rather might be found guilty of using divine things against God the author of them, whom that miraculous eclipse could not convert. St. Paul having sufficiently instructed Dionysius in the principles and duties required of him to believe and perform, (his learning and other good accomplishments and virtues qualifying him for the discharge of so great a trust,) is thought to have consecrated him the first bishop of Athens.

The next stage of St. Paul's laborious life was Corinth, whither he betook himself upon his journey from Athens^u. Meeting here with Priscilla and Aquila, (who fled thither upon their banishment from Rome by the edict of Claudius the emperor against all Jews,) he instructed them in the Christian faith. And that he might give the less offence to his new converts, and be less chargeable to them, he wrought with them at his own trade in which he was brought up, that of a tentmaker. Nor ought it to seem strange that this vocation should be adjoined to the more ingenuous part of his education, that of philosophy and the law, it being a received custom amongst the Jews

^r Is. xlv. 15.^s Acts xvii. 34.^t See Dr. Cave in St. Paul.^u Acts xviii.

so to do. And one of their proverbial expressions is, that he that teaches not his son some trade, teaches him to be a thief. Hither Silas and Timotheus came to him, whom he had probably sent into Macedonia, when, according to his orders, they had followed him from Beroea to Athens; after whose arrival he seems to have written his First Epistle to the Thessalonians. Thus assisted, he attacks the Jews with greater vigour: but his ill success upon them caused him especially to apply himself to the Gentiles. A year and six months' preaching had had considerable influence upon many of the Corinthians, particularly the ruler of the synagogue and his family; and a heavenly vision had increased the apostle's hopes of a plentiful harvest.

This long calm promised no less, had it not been at last disturbed by the envy of the Jews. They with great violence dragging St. Paul before the proconsul's tribunal, full of clamorous complaints, and accusations of having violated their law^a, were by him rebuked for bringing superstitious and impertinent causes, not fit for him to determine. Having therefore thrown their indictment out of the court, he was forced, if not to use, yet at least to permit and connive at violence in return, without which they were not to be quelled. For, to shew his dislike, when the Greeks took Sosthenes the chief ruler of the Jews' synagogue, and a principal man in this tumultuous insurrection, and beat him, Gallio, the proconsul, (and brother to the famous Seneca,) to shew his dislike of these appeals, did not offer in the least to vindicate him from the affront, but *cared for none of these things*. Some time longer he stayed here, and is thought then to write his Second to the Thessalonians. Having confirmed the brethren, he departed into Syria, designing for Jerusalem^y. With him were also Priscilla and Aquila, whom he left at Cenchrea, because Aquila, having had a Nazarite's vow upon him, was obliged to make a stay of seven days at least: (as may be seen Numb. vi.) St. Paul, going before to Ephesus, disputed some time in the synagogues, but would not be prevailed with to defer his journey to Jerusalem by a longer stay here^z. Having therefore landed at Caesarea, and saluted the church at Jerusalem, he returned to Antioch: and having, in his travels through Galatia and Phrygia, strengthened his converts which he had gained to the Christian faith, he came again to Ephesus^a. In his absence, Apollos, by the instructions of Priscilla and Aquila, had made great progress in this new discipline, whose learning and persuasive eloquence rendered him afterwards in an eminent manner advantageous, and a very powerful adjutant to St. Paul in his great work^b. He accordingly passed through Achaia, with recommendatory letters from the brethren; and was at Corinth at the time of St. Paul's return to Ephesus^c. Where the apostle baptized several disciples, disputed three months in the synagogue, and afterwards for two years in the school of Tyrannus.

The Jews had several incantations in use and veneration, which they held in greater credit for being invented by and derived from Solomon^d. The effect of these was, as their own historian relates,

^a Acts xviii. 12—17.

^y Ver. 18.

^z Ver. 19—23.

^a See ch. xvi. 6.

^b Acts

xviii. 24—28.

^c Ch. xix. 1—10.

^d Joseph. Ant. viii. 2.

healing diseases, and dislodging evil spirits : and the persons skilled in them were distinguished by the title of *exorcists*^c. Some of these, observing the many miraculous cures wrought by St. Paul, to add greater force to their charms, presumed to change their form, by invoking the name of Jesus over a demoniac. It pleased God, upon this occasion, to put a visible difference between them who applied this powerful name regularly and with commission, and others, who of their own heads, and for ill designs, dared to usurp it. For the demoniac prevailed over these exorcists, to the hazard of their lives ; and at the same time made an extorted confession of the efficacy of that sacred name, and the authority of his apostle. This event contributed to the raising St. Paul's character yet higher^d ; and had a very amazing consequence in the conversion of many from paganism, who had addicted themselves to the studies of magic, for which Ephesus was particularly famous. These men gave a costly testimony of their sincerity, by publicly burning the books that taught those black arts, to the value (as a learned author computes^e) of at least fifteen hundred pounds sterling.

St. Paul had now thoughts of visiting Macedonia and Achaia, by taking those places in his way to Jerusalem, after which he purposed to go to Rome^f. In pursuance of that design, Timothy and Erastus were sent before him into Macedonia ; while himself halted behind, detained probably by the necessity of answering a letter brought him from Corinth by Apollos ; which is done in that Epistle entitled his First to the Corinthians. He seems at this time also to have written his Epistle to the Galatians.

During this stay that famous tumult happened, of which we have a large description in the nineteenth of the Acts^g. It was begun and fomented by men whose gain was godliness ; and the reverence to Diana served for a popular pretence to secure the trade of shrine-making^h. The apostle's danger upon this occasion was so great, and the people's minds so inflamed, that it was not thought proper to delay his intended journey any longer. Coming therefore into Macedoniaⁱ, he is supposed to have written thence his Second Epistle to the Corinthians. After which he passed three months in Greece ; then, declining the way into Syria, upon intimation of a conspiracy against his life, he returned through Macedonia into Asia^m. At Troas, in his way, he brought Eutychus to life again. Thence, by several easy voyages, he arrived at Miletus, where the elders of the Ephesian church meeting him received that admirable exhortation contained in the twentieth of the Acts : and not only that, but (certainly in the course of these travels related in that chapter) Timothy for their bishop too. So probably did the Romans the Epistle written to them ; as may appear from his intention to see the Christians there, mentioned beforeⁿ, compared with Rom. i. 10, 11, and the journeyings through Macedonia and Achaia, Acts xx, compared with Rom. xv. 19, and Acts xxi. with Rom. xv. 25.

From Miletus, by several stages, set down Acts xxi, St. Paul came

^c Acts xix. 13—16. ^f Ver. 17—20. ^g Dr. Cave. ^h Ver. 21, 22. ⁱ Ver. 23—41.
^k 2 Cor. i. 8, 9, 10. ^l Acts xx. 1. ^m Ver. 12. ⁿ Acts xix. 21.

to Jerusalem; not at all diverted from his passage thither by the prediction of those sufferings which there awaited him^a. One part of his business was to bring those charitable collections to the brethren, for which he so highly commends the liberality of the Christians in Macedonia and Achaia^b, proposing these as patterns to Corinth^c, and making an honourable acknowledgment of them to the Romans.

Then it was, that, after consulting with St. James the bishop of Jerusalem^d, and recounting the wonderful successes of his ministry, he, to prevent offence, declared his compliance with the Mosaical rites by a purification prescribed under the law^e. Some Asiatic Jews, who had known his doctrine and conversation among the Gentiles abroad, enraged the people, and endangered his being torn in pieces, had not the captain of the Roman guard rescued and secured him in the castle^f. The method about to be taken for his examination obliged him now again (as before at Philippi) to assert the privileges due to a denizen of Rome^g: whereupon he was brought before the chief priests and council. At this bar, having received an indignity from the high priest^h, he remonstrated the illegality of the violence offered to him in terms that seem most naturally imputable to the inadvertence of a resentment too warm to attend to the character of his judge. At this appearance he found means to elude the malice of his enemies by declaring himself a Pharisee, and engaging those of the same sect on his side. But what could not be done by process was attempted by treachery; and, upon pretence of a second hearing, an ambush was laid to kill the prisoner in his passage to the court. The timely discovery of this plot occasioned his conveyance by night to Cesarea; and made it necessary for him now to be impleaded before the Roman governor, then residing there.

Here he was accused before Felix, who had five years sustained that characterⁱ. A man corrupt in his administration, and otherwise very dissolute in his morals. However, he forbore to give sentence against St. Paul; and, to gratify his curiosity, had a mind to hear somewhat concerning the Christian faith. The apostle took that opportunity of discoursing upon such topics as came home to the governor's case; who with some stings of conscience remanded him back into custody; and would have set him at liberty, had not the disappointed expectations of a bribe inclined him to do an acceptable act to the Jews, by continuing a prisoner who disdained to obtain his freedom by indirect means.

Festus had no sooner succeeded into this post, but the Jews renew their complaints against St. Paul^j. His cause at their instance was reheard; at which time, upon a motion made of carrying him back to Jerusalem, the apostle found it expedient to appeal to Caesar. This was a privilege also belonging to subjects of Rome, that, upon any suspicion of foul dealing, they had liberty to remove a cause out of any inferior court, and refer it to the judgment of the emperor in person.

^a Acts xxi. 11—15; xxiv. 17. ^b Rom. xv. 25, 26. ^c 2 Cor. ix. ^d Acts xxi. 18.
^e Ver. 26, 27. ^f Ch. xxii. 24, 25. ^g Acts xvi. 37. ^h Acts xxiii. ⁱ Ch. xxiv.
^j Ch. xxv.

Agrippa, Herod's successor in the tetrarchate of Galilee^a, came with his sister Bernice to pay their compliments to the new governor: whom he entertained with an account of St. Paul's case; and at their request ordered another public hearing. The apostle's account of his conversion was so surprising, and his vindication so strong, that Agrippa declared in his favour, and saw no reasonable objection to his release, except the impracticableness of it after an appeal.

St. Paul's journey to Rome being thus determined, he was committed to the charge of Julius, a commander in the emperor's own band^b. They took ship at Adramyttium, (now L'Andramiti, or Endramiti,) a port of Troas. The season of the year (it being now the latter end of September or beginning of October) made sailing slow and dangerous, which induced St. Paul to winter in Crete. But the centurion, overruled by the master, ventured to sea; and shortly after came on so tempestuous weather, that the whole company, for fourteen days, gave themselves all for lost^c. Here again God signalized his providence, assuring the apostle that, for his sake, all that sailed with him should be preserved. Which comfortable news he imparted to his companions; and the event proved accordingly. For, though the vessel was lost, not a soul in her perished, but all got safe to the isle of Melita (now Malta^d).

Here he was eminently distinguished again; first, by shaking a viper off his hand without prejudice from the venomous creature; and then, by recovering from a fever and bloody-flux the father of Publius, the principal person in the island. Both which procured him general respect, and plenty of provisions for the remainder of his voyage. After three months he set forward again, and being met by some Christians on the way, was by them conducted to Rome.

Upon his arrival, his first care was to stand well with the Jews there, as persons to whose benefit he designed to apply himself immediately, and yet such as were most likely to take offence at his appeal, as if it were a reproach to the justice of their own nation. Having therefore removed this prejudice, and insinuated the cause of his suffering to be that which their own religion had trained them up in the belief and expectation of; he gained so far upon their affections as to have a second conference by their own appointment for explaining the principles of Christianity to them. The success of this was different; some yielding, others refusing to be convinced. Meanwhile St. Paul was treated with great courtesy by the government; suffered to dwell in a house of his own providing, only with one keeper; free access allowed to him^e; of which the proper use was made, by publishing to all his visitors the doctrine of the gospel. And this liberty of conversation he enjoyed^f and improved for two years together^g.

Thus far St. Luke leads us in his book of the Acts. Towards the end of those two years St. Paul, having some prospect of a speedy release, writes his Epistles to the Philippians, Ephesians, Colossians, and Philemon. After which he went into Italy, where he waited for Timothy's coming (who was set at liberty shortly after him), and then

^a Ch. xvi. ^b Ch. xxvii. ^c Ver. 24. ^d Ch. xxviii. ^e Ver. 16. ^f Ver. 30, 31.

wrote his Epistle to the Hebrews^k. Upon his arrival, he prosecutes his long intended journey into Spain, and is probably thought from thence to come over and preach the gospel in Britain^h. Afterwards he went into Crete, and having left Titus there in quality of their bishop, came from thence in company with Timothy to Judæa. Thence into Asia; and, while Timothy went to Ephesus, he made his first visit to the Colossians; with an intention of spending some time among them. This appears from his desiring Philemon, a person eminent in that church, to provide him with conveniences for some stay to be made there.

From hence designing for Macedonia, he desires Timothy to continue still at Ephesusⁱ. Before this journey he excommunicated Hymenæus and Philetus^k. Arriving in Macedonia, he visited Philippi, and tarried a good while there, as he had given them expectations that he would, in his Epistle to that church^l. From hence he is thought to have sent his first Epistle to Timothy, and that to Titus.

The winter following was spent at Nicopolis^m. Hence he moved to Corinth, where Erastus stayed behind himⁿ: after that to Troas, where he left the *cloke and parchments with Carpus*^o, which Timothy was afterwards ordered to bring with him: then to Miletus^p, where he left Trophimus sick. And at last, the persecution of the Christians having ceased a considerable time before, he goes the second time to Rome.

Here he is made close prisoner, tried for his life by Helius Cæsaræ-anus^q, whom he calls *the lion*^r. This man, Nero, at his departure into Greece, had left invested with exorbitant powers, which he exercised after as exorbitant a manner. At this trial he complains of Alexander the coppersmith's malice^s, and of being deserted by his friends: and presently after it the second Epistle to Timothy was written; in which there are several presages of his approaching martyrdom.

This crown he obtained the year following, together with St. Peter, though not by the same kind of death. For St. Paul, as a Roman citizen, could not be crucified, and therefore was beheaded with a sword. His body was buried in the Via Ostiensis near Rome^t. A stately church was built to the honour of his memory by Constantine the Great; which was afterwards enlarged and beautified by other of the succeeding Christian emperors.

The reader is desired to take notice that this order of St. Paul's travels and sufferings proceeds upon the scheme of our most learned bishop Pearson, in his *Annal. Paulin.*

THE COLLECT.

O God, who, through the preaching of the blessed Apostle Saint Paul, hast caused the light of the Gospel to shine

^k Heb. xiii. 23, 24.

^h Parker's *Antiq. Cantuar.* and Stillingfleet's *Origin. Britan.*

ⁱ 1 Tim. i. 3. ^k 1 Ver. 20.

^l Phil. i. 25, 26.

^m Titus iii. 12.

ⁿ 2 Tim. iv. 20.

^o 1 Ver. 13.

^p 1 Ver. 20.

^q Pearson *Ann. Paul.*

^r 2 Tim. iv. 17.

^s 1 Ver. 14, 16.

^t Hieron. in *Catal. Script.* See Dr. Cave.

throughout the world; Grant, we beseech thee, that we, having his wonderful conversion in remembrance, may shew forth our thankfulness unto thee for the same, by following the holy doctrine which he taught; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen ^u.

THE EPISTLE. Acts ix. 1.

1 *And Saul, yet breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord, went unto the high priest,*

2 *And desired of him letters to Damascus to the synagogues, that if he found any of this way, whether they were men or women, he might bring them bound unto Jerusalem.*

3 *And as he journeyed, he came near Damascus: and suddenly there shined round about him a light from heaven:*

4 *And he fell to the earth, and heard a voice saying unto him, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?*

5 *And he said, Who art thou, Lord? And the Lord said, I am Jesus whom thou persecutest: it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks.*

6 *And he trembling and astonished said, Lord, what wilt thou have me to do? And the Lord said unto him, Arise, and go into the city, and it shall be told thee what thou must do.*

7 *And the men which journeyed with him stood speechless, hearing a voice, but seeing no man.*

word is often used in Scripture, particularly by this apostle, 1 Cor. xiv. 2; and thus the text here is very reconcilable with that Acts xxii. 9, where they are said not to have heard (not to have understood) the voice; which yet in this they are said to hear, (that is, to perceive the sound of.)

8 *And Saul arose from the earth; and when his eyes were opened, he saw no man: but they led him by the hand, and brought him into Damascus.*

9 *And he was three days without sight, and neither did eat nor drink.*

10 *And there was a certain disciple at*

1, 2. Saul, in the fury of his zeal, did not wait for, but addressed himself to the high priest and sanhedrim for orders to take up all Jews at Damascus who confessed Jesus Christ, that they might be made public examples for the terror of others.

3, 4. This light that shone about him and his fellow-travellers was brighter than the sun itself; amazed at the glory whereof he and they who were with him fell

to the ground. (Compare ch. xxii. 9. xxvi. 14.) 5. Saul said, in answer to the voice, (which to him was articulate and distinct, but not understood by the rest.)

6. It cannot but be ill for thee to contend with one so much mightier than thou.

7. They heard the noise, but they did not understand the words; for so the Greek

8. The excessive strength of the light deprived him of sight, ch. xxii. 10.

^u Acts ix. 15; Rom. xv. 19, &c.; 2 Cor. x. 14, 16; Coloss. i. 6; 1 Thess. i. 8, 9.

Damascus, named Ananias; and to him said the Lord in a vision, Ananias. And he said, Behold, I am here, Lord.

11 *And the Lord said unto him, Arise, and go into the street which is called Straight, and enquire in the house of Judas for one called Saul, of Tarsus: for, behold, he prayeth,*

12 *And hath seen in a vision a man named Ananias coming in, and putting his hand on him, that he might receive his sight.*

13 *Then Ananias answered, Lord, I have heard by many of this man, how much evil he hath done to thy saints at Jerusalem:*

14 *And here he hath authority from the chief priests to bind all that call on thy name.*

15 *But the Lord said unto him, Go thy way: for he is a chosen vessel unto me, to bear my name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel:*

16 *For I will shew him how great things he must suffer for my name's sake.*
inflicted such: and yet the prospect of sufferings shall in no degree take off from his endeavours to propagate my truth.

17 *And Ananias went his way, and entered into the house; and putting his hands on him said, Brother Saul, the Lord, even Jesus, that appeared unto thee in the way as thou camest, hath sent me, that thou mightest receive thy sight, and be filled with the Holy Ghost. N.*

18 *And immediately there fell from his eyes as it had been scales: and he received sight forthwith, and arose, and was baptized.*

19 *And when he had received meat, he was strengthened. Then was Saul certain days with the disciples which were at Damascus.*

20 *And straightway he preached Christ in the synagogues, that he is the Son of God.*

21 *But all that heard him were amazed, and said; Is not this he that destroyed them which called on this name in Jerusalem,*

15. This man, so remarkable for his zeal to suppress, shall be a most eminent instrument of advancing my gospel;

16. And endure terrible persecutions, as he of late

sufferings shall in no degree

N. 17. Hence some have thought it probable that Jesus exhibited himself to Saul, as formerly to Stephen, in some glorious form; but that is not a necessary inference from the words.

18. After Ananias had declared the message of God, and what work he had chosen Saul to, Acts xxii. 13—16.

21. This was a very great surprise to all his hearers, who knew very well how dif-

and came hither for that intent, that he might bring them bound unto the chief priests? ferent a purpose he came thither with.

22 But Saul increased the more in strength, and confounded the Jews which dwelt at Damascus, proving that this is very Christ. His knowledge and the success of his arguments grew greater every day: insomuch that the Jews of that place could not answer the proofs he brought that Jesus is the promised Messiah, styled also the Son of God, in their own Scriptures of the Old Testament.

COMMENT.

WE have here a particular account of St. Paul before, in, and after his conversion. Of which I know not how we can profit ourselves more to the purpose of this festival than by making some useful and practical reflections upon each of these circumstances, according to the description given of him in this and other Scriptures taken into the Service of the day*.

1. The consideration which naturally offers itself from his temper and behaviour while yet unconverted is that of a misguided zeal; and what allowances we may hope God will make for such designs and actions as do really proceed from it.

That this was manifestly St. Paul's case, the apologies he makes for himself inform us. He frankly owns the fury of his proceedings, the barbarity of his intentions, and the indefatigable pains he took by all means to drive those who were already Christians to apostasy, and to terrify others from taking upon them a profession so ill treated in the world†. But then he charges all this heat to the prejudices of his education, which had possessed his mind with more than ordinary veneration for the law and traditions of the Jews‡. And in regard our blessed Saviour had always been represented by the rulers of the people and the elders of Israel as a breaker and changer of the law, therefore this Pharisee (agreeably to the genius of that rigorous sect) verily thought with himself that he ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth§.

In consequence of this persuasion he acted, as was natural to a man sensible that the present dictates of every one's conscience are the next immediate light by which the moral good or evil of our actions is represented to us. And in regard he followed this light without any collusion or prevarication, did what he did upon a notion of duty, and wanted not the regulation of his will, but only the better information of his understanding: from hence he takes upon him to affirm that he had all along lived in good conscience before God¶. But how are we to understand this conscience to be good? Was it free from error? Or were the actions done in compliance with it void of offence before God? No such matter. For he elsewhere calls himself blasphemer, injurious, persecutor, nay, chief of sinners; and all for that very reason, because he persecuted the church of God*. His conscience therefore was only so far good, as it could testify his integrity, and

* Ch. xxii. xvi.

† Ch. xxii. 4, 5; xxvi. 10, 11.

‡ Gal. i. 13; Acts xxvi. 4, 5.

§ Ch. xxvi. 9.

¶ Acts xxiii. 1.

* 1 Tim. i. 13, 15.

that he was an honest, though mistaken man. But his continuing under that mistake was a sin; and his doing so many violent inhuman outrages upon Christians, for no other provocation but difference of opinion, was a much greater sin. He might and ought to have considered this new doctrine, with all the wonderful attestations to it, calmly and fairly: and had he done so, Jesus would have been found, not a destroyer, but a fulfiller of that law, for the honour of which he was so intemperately zealous. Though therefore ignorance were the ground of all his rage, yet even that ignorance was a sin; because the object of it was not the facts he was doing (in which case ignorance acquits from guilt), but it was ignorance of the rule he ought to act by. Now this every man is bound at his peril to know; and cannot be innocent, if, for want of such knowledge, he shall be carried away to do that which is amiss. This then was St. Paul's case—he *thought he ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth*. Whereas, had the matter been fairly examined (all prejudices apart), the result would have been that *he ought to do every thing in his power that could be any way serviceable to that very name*.

Meanwhile all ignorance, which is not voluntary and affected, being not entirely a fault, but in some measure a misfortune, does without doubt render the person's case pitiable, and a proper object of the Divine compassion. This is the mitigation allowed by St. Peter to the wickedest of all facts, the crucifixion of the blessed Jesus—*Brethren, I wot, that through ignorance ye did it, as did also your rulers^d*. Upon this our Lord himself grounds that prayer upon the cross—*Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do^e*! And to this it is that St. Paul attributes his own pardon—I *obtained mercy, because I did it ignorantly in unbelief^f*.

Herein however we shall do well to contemplate the absolute freedom of God's grace. Who, when he might most justly have left St. Paul, as he did those Jews, under the power and punishment of obstinacy and unbelief, chose rather, for an example and encouragement to all well-meaning though mistaken men, to shew forth in him, as himself expresses it, *all long-suffering, for a pattern to them who should hereafter believe on him^g*. This gives us a right notion of God's proceeding with our great apostle; and shews that his conversion, and the happy consequences of it, were an effect of *exceeding abundant grace^h*; that his ignorance, and the facts owing to it, did plainly incline God to mercy, because the ignorance was not wilful: but still, that such ignorance could not engage, or by any covenant-right lay claim to mercy; because, with due care and impartial application, it might have been first prevented or afterwards cured: that the mercy obtained by St. Paul was first a thorough conviction of his error, and perfect knowledge of the truth; then fervent zeal and fit opportunities put into his hands to testify the sincerity of his intention, and make ample reparation to that righteous cause which he had before with equal zeal obstructed and persecuted.

All which, when rightly considered, are an excellent warning, of how great importance it is to every man that his conscience be rightly

^d Acts iii. 17.

^e Luke xxi. 34.

^f 1 Tim. i. 13.

^g 1 Tim. i. 16.

^h 1 Tim. i. 14.

informed. That in all matters (those relating to religion especially) we take all possible heed not to be carried into any sinful excesses by the prejudices of education, or the undue admiration of men's persons, or the violence of our own passions, or the affection to any party, or the prospect of any secular interest; or, in short, by any regards whatsoever, except those that shall be found strictly, and upon calm and diligent inquiry, due to the will of God, the testimony of his holy word, and the result of our own best reason in matters not there mentioned, representing to us the true state and merits of the cause when weighed in this (this only just) balance.

Again, as the case of St. Paul before his conversion should induce us to prevent the danger of an ignorant and erroneous conscience; so does it teach us how to judge of such actions as are done for want of that timely care, and shew the great guilt and mischief of mistaken principles. The guilt is plain from hence, that moral good and evil depend upon reasons intrinsic to the things themselves, and cannot be changed, either as to their nature or degree, by the opinions entertained concerning them. If therefore an action be evil in itself, or declared so to be by any positive law, it is not the thinking it innocent or good, nor is it the ignorance of that law which pronounces it evil, that can acquit the party who upon any present persuasion shall venture to commit it: because this persuasion is founded upon a mistake, and might have been rectified by attending to that rule, which every one with due care may and is bound at his peril to know. The mischief of such mistakes is unconceivable. For no wickedness is so black, but persons who proceed upon prejudice may by degrees be brought to esteem it not only lawful, but even commendable and holy. Of this the barbarities executed by St. Paul are indeed an eminent, but far from the only instance. For almost every age hath felt by sad experience that the rights of society have never been more dangerously insulted, nor the sacred name of religion more scandalously abused, than by the furious attempts of those seduced and unrelenting zealots, who sanctify all their avarice, oppression, and cruelty with the false notions of reforming abuses, vindicating religion, and doing God service. So fatal to a man's own self, so pernicious to other people, are those blind prepossessions which naturally fly out into rage and violence; and, not having sound knowledge to temper their heat, rashly go into unwarrantable measures, which no goodness of intention can make atonement for.

But in regard such intention was observed before to be a proper motive for inclining the mercy of God toward them that unwarily act amiss under its influence; the example of St. Paul may be further useful, by giving us intimation what sort of mercy that is, and upon what terms there may be ground to hope for it. Now this in his case (and we may judge proportionably of others) was a powerful awakening of his conscience, enlightening that judgment which before had led him wrong, and turning that general disposition to serve God and promote his truth into the right and acceptable way of doing both. Happy therefore are those mistaken men, who have (like him) the irregularities of their past proceedings pardoned, their former errors

rectified, their well-intending minds informed, and, above all, their wills made ready to submit to and comply with such means as the ordinary methods of knowledge and salvation, seconded and set home by God's grace, shall furnish for those purposes. For we are not now to expect that God should go out of the common way, and make miraculous conversions of every man who does ill without designing ill. And therefore, in order to profiting effectually by the instance before us, it will be necessary with some care to consider St. Paul in the next state propounded; that is.

II. Secondly, with regard to the time and circumstances of his conversion. And here are several things related on God's and several on St. Paul's part that require our consideration.

On God's part we may observe, first, the opening of this scene, by that light from heaven which shone round St. Paul and his fellow-travellers¹; a sudden, a *great* light², a light *above* even the *brightness of the sun*³, though it were then high noon, and the sun consequently in the full strength of his lustre.

All this must be acknowledged very surprising, if considered barely in itself, and with regard to the nature of the thing; but when we take in the condition and character of the persons concerned, there arises another consideration, which renders it much more significant and extraordinary. Now these were Jews, all zealous for the Mosaic law, and conversant in the history of the Old Testament. They could not consequently be ignorant that such strong emanations of light as this were the method usually made choice of by God for exhibiting his glory and peculiar presence. Many instances of that kind are recorded in the books of Moses⁴, many in the prophetic Scriptures⁵, which seem plainly to be intended, and were constantly understood, to this purpose. And those interpreters appear to have judged very reasonably of the case before us, who suppose the whole company falling on their faces to the ground to have done so; as well by that act of prostration to express their profound reverence of the Divinity, whose glorious presence that brightness signified, as from the strength of a light which they were not able to bear up against.

Such, it is evident, was wont heretofore to be the behaviour of men thus made sensible that God was more immediately approaching toward them⁶. And it is easy to discern how exceedingly wise and proper an introduction this was to the miraculous conversion now about to be wrought upon St. Paul. A zeal so violent as his would ask some uncommon and very forcible motives to persuade and control it. And a change so strange as that now ready to be made, from the bitterest of persecutors to the cagereast and most laborious apostle, would meet with greater credit and success, in proportion as it could be made appear that God himself was at the bottom and beginning of it. Such uncontested marks of a divine presence and power were therefore of infinite use to be imparted to his fellow-travellers in

¹ Acts ix. 3.

² Acts xxii. 6.

³ Acts xvi. 13.

⁴ Exod. xvi. 10; xxiv. 16, 17;

xl. 34, 35; Levit. ix. 23; Numb. xvi. 19, 42.

⁵ 2 Chron. v. 14; vii. 1, 2, 3; Ezek. i.

4, 28; x. 4; Maim. More Nevoch. i. 64.

⁶ Gen. xvii. 3; Lev. ix. 24; Numb. xx. 6;

Ezek. i. 28; xlv. 4; Dan. viii. 17; 2 Chron. vii. 3.

common, as so many witnesses of the terrors and majesty of him, whose symbol that light was, appearing upon this occasion. And they were highly serviceable to St. Paul in particular, by giving a check to his fury, striking an awe upon his mind, awakening his attention, and disposing him, with all due submission and devotion, to be influenced by the following parts of the miracle, in which he was singled out from the rest. For though even here he was chiefly, there he was wholly and solely concerned.

For the next thing remarkable in this transaction shews plainly for whose sake the whole was meant. A voice directed to St. Paul alone, in words which speak the meekness and goodness, as the shining glory from whence it came declared the majesty, of the person uttering them. *Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?* are words carrying rather the form of a gentle expostulation than that of anger and reproach, from one who had so just grounds of resentment given him by the injurious treatment of this mistaken zealot. It expresses the infinite tenderness of this mystical Head, who, even in his glorified state, is a sufferer in his afflicted members, and esteems the wrongs done to any of them done to himself. It imports that there could be no just provocation alleged for all the outrages committed upon them that believed, purely because they believed in him. And therefore it calls upon the committer of them to recollect, and think better of a matter that had not been sufficiently considered before. And meeting with a mind now calmed and prepared for better impressions, it produced a desire of more perfect information, expressed in that question, who this person was that so kindly complained of such ill usage from him. To this our Lord replies in few but very significant words, that he was *Jesus of Nazareth*. That very despised man whom St. Paul thought an impostor, and as real and heinous a malefactor as any that commonly died the scandalous death of the cross. And yet he now appeared to him with all the confessed evidences of the true God. Here therefore is implied the certainty of our Saviour's resurrection, of his living in heaven, of his sitting on the right hand of the majesty on high, of his power and dominion as Lord of all; the truth of his doctrine and miracles, the reasonableness of that faith so barbarously persecuted; and especially the danger of persisting in attempts against him, sure to be vain in themselves, and fatal to the undertakers. For thus much is manifestly designed by that last sentence, *It is hard for thee to kick against the pricks*. So comprehensive are the terms in which our Lord delivered himself when taken in conjunction with the other circumstances of this account: so powerful the effect of this short conversation, of which none but St. Paul was made partaker. But to him, who understood the true force of the whole argument, so strong and convincing, that, without any vindication of himself, or other reply, except such as requested, and submitted entirely to, any farther directions necessary for his condition, the mighty work was done in such a manner as must have rendered it a miracle, almost equal to that of his conversion, had he not been reduced and converted by it.

A third remark proper upon this occasion arises from the method

in which a change, so miraculously begun, was carried on to perfection. Now it is very observable that St. Paul was referred to Ananias; that by his ministry he received farther instruction and comfort, the sacrament of baptism, and the recovery of his sight. A significant emblem of his better information, as the blindness he for three days laboured under had been of the darkness and error formerly upon his mind. But the reflections I would principally recommend from this manner of proceeding are, that Almighty God, though he will not spare for miracles in extraordinary exigencies, does not yet think fit to be profuse in them where such necessity ceases: that even his uncommon appearances, in order to men's conviction, do not render the sacraments, and other established means of conversion and grace, either useless or needless: that it is one thing to be persuaded of the truth of Christianity, and sincerely disposed to obey it, and another to be actually a Christian: that baptism, administered to a convert under such circumstances, is a sufficient intimation how guilty and fatal a neglect those deluded people allow themselves in who treat this and other like ordinances with scorn and contempt, and vainly presume upon the privileges of the gospel before the seals of the covenant have secured their right to them: and that the most perverse abuse men can possibly make of this miracle would be, to go on securely in sin, and defer their conversion, by neglecting to apply such means as are ordinarily necessary, and ordinarily sufficient, upon idle pretences of waiting for such awakening and extraordinary calls and illuminations as that which God vouchsafed to the apostle of this day. The mighty difference between whose case and theirs will shortly appear, when we come to consider the part contributed by St. Paul himself to the finishing that wonderful conversion, the success whereof our church is now thankfully commemorating.

Meanwhile we must least of all omit to observe a fourth mercy on God's part, which in truth crowned all the rest, I mean, the powerful operation of divine grace upon his mind. Without this inward, the outward, though altogether miraculous, had wanted its effect. We have all the reason in the world to conclude so, not only from the present depravity of human nature in general, but from several instances, recorded in Scripture, of like wonderful appearances, without any visible success. Was the glory of God's presence manifested, and a voice from heaven uttered, to warn St. Paul who Jesus was, and how necessary obedience to him is? Such glorious light was seen, such miraculous voice was heard, by the Jews at our Lord's baptism by John, and yet, among that multitude of hearers and spectators, we read not of one convert made by either. Was St. Paul struck down to the ground by the power of Jesus? So were the soldiers who came to apprehend him in the garden; and they, it is plain, persisted in their wicked purpose notwithstanding. Lastly, was he smitten with blindness for three days? Elymas the sorcerer was so for a much longer time; who hath left us however no ground to believe that he did not still continue *full of all subtlety and all malice, a child of the devil, and an enemy of all righteousness*. Now what account are we

able to give ourselves why the same events, though all plainly miraculous, should have so different effects, but only this, that in some they were made successful by those secret and divine influences from above, which the all-wise God, for just reasons known to himself, was not pleased to afford to others? So certain it is, that he is the author and finisher of all that is good in us; and that no external remedies or helps, how powerful or affecting soever they may seem in their own nature, can take place, or answer our purposes or our wants, except the heart and will be prepared and moved, and the outward application be seconded and set home by the internal workings of grace upon the soul.

But we have not done justice to the virtues of this apostle, till it hath been observed, secondly, how far he was instrumental in his own conversion; and what pious dispositions the history takes notice of, which might incline and render him a proper object for so wonderful a mercy.

Now the temper and deportment suited to the several steps of this proceeding are really admirable; and such as abundantly declared the probity of his mind, by the manner of bringing him to a change of his measures.

The awful reverence expressed at the first display of our Lord's glory; the ready submission to his call; the entire resignation of himself to his conduct in that noble question, *Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?* the severe mortification of a three days' fast; the fervent prayers, and all the testimonies of a sorrowful penitence, during that time; the devout engagement in the profession of Christ's religion, by baptism received at the hands of Ananias; the many evidences of a generous and excellent spirit, which so speedily and so thoroughly vanquished the prejudices of education, and went so resolutely into the service of the lately hated and persecuted name of Jesus, even when expressly forewarned how great things he must suffer for his sake; the being content to enter upon a new course, directly opposite to his former opinions and practices; and to encounter the scoffs and the malice of his friends and countrymen, which would naturally be more provoked and implacable, in proportion to the eagerness of his zeal once exerted the quite contrary way: these are such instances of sincerity and piety as have no parallel in story. Such as undeniably prove that humour and obstinacy, party and interest, and the world, had no part either in his errors or his conversion. They are such as give immortal lustre to his character, and render the happy gaining of this apostle scarcely more wonderful on God's part than commendable and virtuous on his own.

What was said in the close of my last particular may suffice so to explain this, that, in magnifying the compliance of St. Paul, I may not be thought in any degree to derogate from the grace of God. It was under the constant influence and conduct of this grace that every step of the good work was taken. To this was owing the generous probity of his mind; by this his every good inclination was excited; by this he was convinced, enlightened, established, and perfected. But still, I conceive, in such a way as made the actions his, though

the glory of them continued to be God's; that is, they were voluntary and rewardable in St. Paul, who very emphatically says of himself that *he was not disobedient to the heavenly vision*^s. A hard and seemingly arrogant expression, if that obedience were the effect of absolute necessity and force irresistible; but very well consistent with and becoming such a concurrence of the will as was wrought by most powerful assistances of grace within, no less than by the most miraculous evidences of truth from without.

I should now proceed to the last thing proposed, and consider such other passages in the service of the day as describe St. Paul's behaviour after his conversion. But so much as is needful of this kind will presently occur to my reader in my following treatise upon the gospel for this festival.

All I add here shall consist in a reflection or two more immediately relating to the subject now in hand.

As, first, the example before us furnishes a good rule for judging of our own or of other people's zeal. It shews the possibility of being under strong prepossessions, exceeding vehement for grievous errors, furiously bent against those of a different judgment, and yet that all this may be consistent with honesty and a good meaning. And ought we not from hence learn to enlarge our charity, by forbearing to censure even our adversaries, nay even our persecutors, as wretches lost to all integrity and conscience? Such sentences are too often barbarous and unjust, and, in St. Paul's case, had been manifestly false. And doubtless we should do more real service to God and our cause by believing the best, hoping almost against hope, pitying the ignorance, patiently contending with the prejudices, and praying for the pardon and amendment of the faults and furious oppositions of contradictors and persecutors, than by rashly impleading their integrity, pronouncing their intentions wicked, and accounting them all to be the children of hypocrisy and hell.

2. But the same example which persuades such tenderness in judging others, is a very good argument for being exceeding nice and severe in judging ourselves. Men are too frequently imposed upon by specious appearances of zeal; and think thereby not only to excuse but even to sanctify many unwarrantable actions. Whereas, would they bring these to St. Paul's standard, the difference would soon be found between that which is really a zeal for God, and that which affects to pass for it. For if men will not be brought fairly to consider; if they stick pertinaciously to their point, and refuse to submit to all methods of conviction; if upon conviction they do not effectually disengage themselves from such prepossessions as can no longer be justified; if the same affectionate and vigorous desires do not appear in favour of truth lately discovered, as were used to exert themselves for beloved and inveterate errors: these persons have none of those marks to shew which proved St. Paul's sincerity; and mistaken zeal is too tender a name in such cases. And it ought to be remembered that one in much better circumstances, who had no partiality or indirect ends to be suspected of, did yet style himself *blas-*

phemer, injurious, and chief of sinners, for even those very things which he did ignorantly, and verily thought himself obliged to do against the name of Jesus of Nazareth.

Lastly, let us admire and extol the wisdom of Almighty God for the mighty advantages which the Christian religion received by the conversion of this apostle in particular. For (as an ancient Father^t well represents it) "Who was Paul? Once a persecutor, but now a preacher of Christ. And what made this change? Was he bought over? Alas! there was nobody disposed to bribe him to it. No. It was because he saw Christ, was convinced, and worshipped, and was caught up into heaven. He took his journey to Damascus that he might persecute; and after three days did there commence preacher. And with what power! Others, in matters concerning themselves, produce the testimony of their own friends and retainers; but I produce a witness who was once an enemy. And can any doubt stick with you after this? The evidence of Peter and John are of great weight, it is true; but a man disposed to be jealous might object that these were companions and servants. But can any one question the truth of his evidence who first was a professed enemy to Jesus, and afterwards died for him? I have, for my part, always admired the wise management of the Holy Ghost on this occasion in ordering that the Epistles written by others should be few, but Paul's, the late persecutor, no less than fourteen. Not that Peter or John were inferior to Paul, but because his were more likely to persuade. And accordingly we read, *All that heard him were amazed, and said, Is not this he that destroyed them which called on this name in Jerusalem, and came hither for that intent, that he might bring them bound unto the chief priests? But now he preacheth the faith which once he destroyed. And they glorified God in him.*" To the same God let us also give glory for ever and ever. Amen.

THE GOSPEL. St. Matt. xix. 27.

27 *Peter answered and said unto Jesus, Behold, we have forsaken all, and followed thee; what shall we have therefore?*

28 *And Jesus said unto them, Verily I say unto you, That ye which have followed me, in the regeneration when the Son of man shall sit in the throne of his glory, ye also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.* See the Comment.

29 *And every one that hath forsaken houses, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my name's sake, shall receive an hundred-fold, and shall inherit everlasting life.*

30 *But many that are first shall be last; and the last shall be first.*

COMMENT.

THE occasion of this discourse between our blessed Saviour and St. Peter was administered by that rich young man, who is said, in the foregoing part of this chapter^a, to have rejected a promise of treasure in heaven when clogged with the condition of abandoning his possessions upon earth. That refusal moved our Lord to make a reflection, very surprising to all that heard it, upon the great danger of riches^b, and the fatal obstruction they ordinarily prove to such a resignation of mind as true piety and the virtues of a Christian state imply and require. From that observation St. Peter takes the advantage of magnifying that voluntary renunciation of the world which he and his brethren had set an example of^c; insinuating withal that some very great and glorious recompense must certainly be reserved for so uncommon an instance of heavenly-mindedness. To this our Lord agrees, in a prediction of peculiar honours intended for the apostles^d; which I shall have a fit opportunity to consider hereafter^e: but adds a proverbial aphorism^f, whereof I shall at present choose to treat; because in it chiefly I conceive the matter to be couched which renders the passage now before us a subject proper to be chosen for the Gospel of this festival.

All that would otherwise have been necessary for explaining what is meant by the *first being last, and the last first*, hath been already said at large, when the following parable concerning the labourers in the vineyard, by which this sentence is illustrated, came under consideration^g. My manner therefore of handling it at present shall be,

I. To enforce some practical doctrines which our blessed Master seems to have intended his disciples should gather from thence. Then,

II. From an example, answering to each branch of it, to shew how proper and seasonable truths those were for the apostles to be put in mind of. And,

III. Lastly, to make such application of these doctrines and examples as may be suitable to the day.

I. I begin with some doctrines and practical reflections naturally resulting from this sentence.

1. Now one of these I take to be, that all the outward advantages of life, most valued and admired by the generality of mankind, are not in the same esteem with Almighty God. And the plain reason is, because nothing is of any account with him but inward holiness and virtue, which these of themselves cannot effect: nor are we one whit the purer or better for them. It is the glory of religion to be calculated for all sorts and conditions of men. And it will one day greatly aggravate the condemnation of the wicked, that as no circumstances of person or fortune can make us good without our own care and pains, so neither can any render it impracticable for them to be

^a Ver. 16, &c. ^x Ver. 24, &c. ^y Ver. 27. ^z Ver. 28, 29. ^e Gospel for St. Bartholomew.

^b Ver. 30.

^c Gospel for Septuagesima Sunday.

virtuous and good who are well resolved and seriously disposed to it. The ancient philosophers have therefore very pertinently styled the things of this nature *instruments of life*. For, like all other instruments, they do nothing of themselves, but depend entirely upon the hand of the artificer: and every thing they are employed about will be well or ill finished according to the skill or the ignorance, the neglect or the due application of the person under whose direction they fall.

This is manifestly the case with riches and authority and knowledge, and the rest of them.

For riches (first). How manifold are the benefits of a plentiful estate, and how public a blessing may the possessor of it become to his own and to future ages, provided he have the soul to make a right use of it! If his heart and his hands be open to the distressed members of Christ, what stately habitations, what bright and incorruptible crowns, may so fading a treasure ensure by refreshing their bowels and covering their nakedness! But if this shall be made, in the very worst and most literal senso of the words, *the mammon of unrighteousness*; if a man resolve to get it, though by means never so unjust; and will keep it, though by a management never so sordid; if the sufferings of the afflicted and the cries of widows and orphans can be seen and heard without any impression; if he so far *make gold his god, and the fine gold his confidence*, as to place his affections and happiness there; then the wealth which might have procured his exaltation proves his snare and certain downfall. And of such as these it is that the rich young man gave occasion for saying, *A rich man shall hardly enter into the kingdom of God*. And again, *It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God*^d. So justly is the observation I am now upon deduced from the passage in hand; in regard the conference with that young man, and the remarks of our blessed Lord upon his ill conduct, drew on the whole of this day's Gospel, which relates what passed between him and St. Peter, after so extraordinary an experiment of the influence riches have.

The same must be acknowledged most true concerning reputation and honour and authority. For what are these but so much power to do good, if they who have it will exert that power, by leading their inferiors into virtue, who are generally disposed to follow persons of eminence and esteem? But if such shall degenerate into mean designs and popular vices, if they set up for patrons of irreligion, and encourage wickedness by great examples, what hopes can be entertained, what mischiefs may not be feared from consciences so profligate and enslaved? This courting the opinion of others at the expense of their character and their duty is elsewhere alleged as the cause that detained the scribes and Pharisees in their obstinate infidelity. *How can ye believe*, says our Lord, *who receive and seek honour one of another, and seek not that honour which cometh from God only*^e?

But of all worldly advantages, knowledge sure is the most truly

^d Matt. xxiii. 24.

^e John v. 44.

manly and desirable. And of all knowledge, that which hath more immediately religion and our duty for its object. Yet even this, which may seem so directly to carry us to our proper happiness, is sometimes the occasion of greater perverseness in error and misery. This appeared most evidently at the first setting out of the gospel. The honourable and wealthy, nay, the reputed wiser and better prepared, were not only slower in embracing, but more violent in opposing its progress than those of meaner condition and attainments. So was it with the apostle of this day in particular: the reason of all which is one and the same; namely, that every temporal advantage is capable of an ill no less than of a good use: and where things may be turned either way, the corruption of human nature is extremely apt to turn them the worse way.

2. Another necessary instruction which our Lord seems to have intended from these words is, that good beginnings are of no service, except care be taken to bring them to perfection. Such beginnings have indeed their just value and commendation; but this chiefly depends upon the hopes we conceive, that what is begun well will not fail to be finished so. For no virtue is safe without a disposition to all virtue; nor any crown to be attained without steadfastness and perseverance. It is in the Christian as in every other race; he that is beaten out at the last heat loses the honour and the prize as certainly as if he had set out ingloriously, and never run well at all. Of this also the example of the rich young man gave but too sensible an experiment. For he who had made the moral law his constant study and practice, and *kept all the commandments from his youth up*^f, nay, who was very zealous and aspiring after yet higher degrees of virtue, did yet never arrive to a complete good man; but gave out dishonourably, and forfeited all, at the last proposal of giving up the treasures of this world in exchange for those of a better. So necessary it is for every man to be thoroughly resolved to keep the goal continually in his eye, and from this prospect to be quickened with the shame and danger of a relapse. For the constant remembrance of all undertakings being crowned by the end would spur us on to do and suffer any thing in our great concern, rather than suffer ourselves to lose our past pains by proving at last but *almost Christians*. And surely the bitterest remorse to a guilty lost wretch must needs be that of falling back into hell from the very confines and gate of heaven. These I take to be practical observations very naturally resulting from the former clause of our blessed Lord's aphorism, that *many who are first shall be last*.

3. There is a third, which offers itself to us from the latter clause, that *the last shall be first*. And that is a mighty encouragement to all such as, either through want of a good education, or neglect to improve it afterwards, have not made the same prosperous beginnings, or not the same careful advances in piety with their brethren. This is in truth a deplorable, but by no means a desperate case. For there is room still left for industry and zeal; and a possibility of those *last* with regard to time and other advantages becoming *first* in the

^f Matt. xix. 20.

degrees of acceptance and reward. Thus much seems plainly represented by the following parable. In which the labourers called to the work at different hours of the day were notwithstanding all made even at night: and the very latest, who had wrought but one hour, esteemed not unworthy of the same wages with those hired at the earliest hour of the morning. This dispensation, it is true, as figured there, appears to imply both a ready compliance with the first offer, and an extraordinary application upon the closing with it. The different circumstances under which Jews and Gentiles came in to the gospel are without controversy the primary intention of that parable. But since God hath solemnly engaged that *at what time soever the wicked man turns from his wickedness, and doeth that which is lawful and right, he shall save his soul alive*^f, I cannot think any violence or wrong done to this passage by saying, that it likewise administers comfort and great hope to them who, even in the midst of light, have continued under the power of darkness and error, and *held the truth in unrighteousness*. Let these then be persuaded to begin, though late, to live well; worthy of and suitably to their opportunities; and their repentance shall not be rejected. Let their after care approve the sincerity of their conversion, and it can never come unseasonably. For even in this sense also, they who labour vigorously, though they have stood almost all the day idle, shall find that their *labour is not in vain in the Lord*.

Such are the practical doctrines which we may reasonably presume this passage was designed to suggest. Let it now be observed in the

II. Second place, how very proper and seasonable these were for the apostles to be put in mind of at that time. It hath been already said, that the occasion of this sentence was administered by an invidious comparison made by St. Peter in favour of himself and his brethren; who, much unlike to the young man spoken of before, had distinguished their love and obedience to Christ by *forsaking all, and following him*. Now amidst this sufficiency and self-satisfaction it was very requisite to let them understand, that as God had a just regard to those virtues which one day should exalt them in his heavenly kingdom far above those rich and great and worldly-wise who were *first*, as to the accomplishments and advantages of the present life; so they were to remember that the most laudable beginnings are but beginnings; that the reward does not become due till the work and the day are ended; and as these advances, if proportionably carried on, would entitle them to a just preeminence above common Christians, so if their fidelity should warp, or their zeal cool hereafter, this would check and disappoint their hopes, and greatly abate or utterly destroy their fairest prospects.

Again, allowing their piety never so firm, and their elevation such as is fitly resembled by *sitting upon thrones*^h; yet ought they not to imagine those honours and distinctions so peculiarly theirs, that none but the attendants upon Christ's own person could be qualified to attain them. For God can, when he pleases, at any time raise up such instruments of his own glory and the salvation of mankind, that

^f Ezek. xviii. 27.

^h Matt. xix. 28.

their labours and constancy and sufferings shall make large amends for any other circumstances which might be thought a lessening of their character. And so these *last* in that respect may become *first*. They may equal, I mean, if not exceed those apostles themselves in the good they do, and the recompense they shall receive at the hand of God for it. Of both these cases there were shortly after two eminent instances, so wonderful in their kind, and so awakening to these apostles, that a man may fairly presume our Lord to have had them in view; and thus to have foretold, not only what should be done to all the world in general, but what should be the condition of those two persons in particular.

The former of these is Judas. Chosen into the highest and most honourable order; admitted to the constant conversation of his blessed Master; one who daily heard the Divine instructions by which he enlightened the ignorant, encouraged the honest and willing, silenced the gainsayers, and put the obstinate and malicious to confusion; one who had the most sensible demonstrations of his power and glory, equal in all external privileges to the rest of that noble fraternity, who exalted the name and kingdom of their Lord, and carried his cross triumphantly round the world; wanting no qualification to equal their virtue and renown too, except such as he was wanting to himself in—an honest and good heart. Yet did this man at length prove a *devil*, a betrayer and murdererⁱ. His name is a reproach and a by-word to all ages and nations; and of him is declared that he was *the son of perdition*^k, and that *good were it for him if he had never been born*^l. So far are the greatest privileges from securing any man's happiness and salvation without the continuance of God's grace and that of his own care and perseverance. So seasonable was this check to the confidence of these apostles, when even of their own number so dreadful an example would quickly be made of a man, *first* in the opportunities of being good and happy above common believers, but made *last* by his own fault.

As visibly was the latter branch of this sentence made good in that saint, whose wonderful conversion the church, this day commemorating, hath upon that account very fitly appointed the scripture before us to bear a part in that service. For what could be more contrary to Christ and his kingdom, what in all human appearance more desperate and lost, what more distant from an apostle and martyr, than the injurious, the blaspheming, the persecuting Saul? And yet—behold and admire the merciful providence of God, and the amazing power of his grace!—in the midst of all this spite and fury, in the very execution of those bloody commissions, mentioned in the offices for this day, this violent mistaken man was on the sudden enlightened, confounded, softened, by a vision and voice from heaven. Thus checked, he employs his journey to Damascus, to purposes most foreign from those it had been undertaken for. He becomes one of the converts to a religion which he came to vex and persecute: and all the eager zeal, whereby men before were *compelled to blaspheme*, is turned on the side of the truth, and exerted in every motive that elo-

ⁱ John vi. 70.^k John xvii. 12.^l Matt. xxvi. 24.

quence, joined with example, could inspire, for prevailing with his hearers to *count all things but dross and dung, so they might win Christ*, and generously despise the troubles and terrors, of which himself had been hitherto the dreaded instrument, and merciless inflicter.

The holy indignation he conceived against his former practices; the admirable meekness and humility of his deportment, and yet, at the same time, the invincible patience and resolution of his mind; the indefatigable diligence in preaching, in disputing, in writing; the strength of his arguments; the charms of his rhetoric; the winning prudence of his address and condescension; the painfulness and hazards of his travels; the undaunted courage before kings and governors, in threatenings and dangers, in chains and courts of justice; and the vast account all these turned to for the advancement of religion; are never to be described, scarce ought to be attempted, by any pen or tongue less divine than that of St. Paul himself. Observe therefore what character he gives of his own ministry: *Scourged of the Jews, to the utmost extremity their law would allow, five several times; thrice beaten with rods, once stoned, thrice in shipwrecks, a night and a day in the deep; in journeyings often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils by his own countrymen, in perils by the heathen, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren; in weariness and painfulness, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness; and, besides all these, (which to be sure was by no means the least article of his sufferings) the care of all the churches: a fellow-feeling of the infirmities and afflictions of the saints, that could not but be a very tender concern and daily oppression upon so affectionate a pastor. Thus he, who declares himself once the chief of sinners, in that he persecuted the church of God^o, became its glory and most shining light. He who was not meet to be called an apostle came in nowise behind the very chiefest apostles, but laboured and endured more abundantly than they all^p; obtained equal favour with God; was caught up into the third heavens; was taught mysterious truths by immediate revelation^q; after infinite toils and sufferings, and prodigious successes, glorified the Lord Jesus by shedding his own blood; and offered his life a most willing sacrifice, in vindication of that truth, for the confession whereof he with such outrageous eagerness hastened to spill the blood of all that should dare to avow it. So eminent an example is he, above any other in the Christian history, of our Saviour's affirmation, that the last should be first.*

It remains only now that I conclude this discourse with two short inferences, suitable to the subject I have been upon, and the occasion of this festival.

1. Now, that *many who are first shall be last* ought to be a warning to all those who have had the happiness of instruction, imbibed good principles early, and made proportionable improvements, that they do not depart from the way in which they have been trained, nor suffer their latter end to be worse than their beginning. It should also

prove an effectual prevention to all those intemperate overvaluings of our own virtue, than which no other temptations are more likely to destroy it, by betraying us into spiritual pride and security. How well aware was our great apostle of this rock! How careful to admonish others of the danger of splitting upon it! The vain confidences of his converted Gentiles at Rome he takes down, with—*Be not highminded, but fear: for if God spared not the natural branches, the Jews, take heed lest he also spare not thee*^r. The falsely presumed indefectibility of his Corinthians he confutes from the example of God's dealings under the old testament; and leaves this advice upon those who depended too far upon the privileges of the new, *Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall*^s. His Philippians he instructs, that the *salvation of a Christian is to be wrought out with fear and trembling*^t; and therefore declares, that he *counts not himself to have apprehended already*, but that, in order to it, he *kept on continually pressing forward to the mark*, as duly sensible that such only who *continue faithful unto the end* can have reasonable hopes of receiving a crown of life^u.

2. As our Lord's declaration, that *the last shall be first*, is a gracious intimation of mercy on God's part, so is the example insisted on from it a good direction what is fit and necessary on our part in order to such advancement. That very large abatements in the account of past faults, and liberal allowances for passions and infirmities and mistakes are made by our great Master and Judge, men are forward enough to infer from the example of St. Paul: and they so far reason justly. But then they would do well to proceed a step or two farther, and observe, from the same example, to what sort of persons such marvellous grace is extended; that they are such as he was. They that bewail and forsake their past faults; that see and are humbled with a sense of them; that conflict with, and, to the best of their ability, subdue, their passions and infirmities. Hence again we learn, that late penitents, when truly and effectually such, will double their diligence, fetch up the time they have lost, and, by an uncommon piety and zeal, testify the sincerity of their conversion, and the thankful esteem they have of it. In a word, that nothing will be more at the heart of such men, than making reparation to the world for any past offences given; and not only wiping out the scandal of a bad example, but exerting all the power and lustre of an omniuntly good one.

To all which purposes, I know not what better expedient to advise, than a devout compliance with the church in the solemnity of this day; and endeavouring to make the apostle of it more and more our pattern, by lively remembrances of his conversion and following life. Both most deservedly commemorated by the church in general, because an invaluable blessing to all the Christian world. But more particularly so to us of this nation, whose once blind and barbarous region was most probably enlightened by his presence and ministry in Britain.

Let us therefore beg most earnestly of God to *give us his grace*^x,

^r Rom. xi. 20.

^s 1 Cor. x. 12.

^t Phil. ii. 12.

^u Ch. iii. 13, 14.

^x Collect.

and labour (as the church hath taught us to pray) *that we may shew forth our thankfulness by following the holy doctrines which he taught.* So shall we at last obtain the crown of righteousness, laid up, not for him only, but for all them who, like him, serve the Lord Jesus, and love his appearing.

To whom, with the Father and Holy Spirit, three Persons and one God, be all honour and glory for evermore.

THE PURIFICATION OF ST. MARY THE VIRGIN.

THE COLLECT.

ALMIGHTY and everliving God, we humbly beseech thy Majesty, that, as thy only-begotten Son was this day^a presented in the temple in substance of our flesh, so we may be presented unto thee with pure and clean hearts, by the same thy Son Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

THE EPISTLE. Mal. iii. 1.

1 Behold, I will send my messenger, and he shall prepare the way before me: and the Lord, whom ye seek, shall suddenly come to his temple, even the messenger of the covenant, whom ye delight in: behold, he shall come, saith the Lord of hosts.
due time send one, more than any prophet, even John Baptist, as a harbinger before me; and the Messiah shall be seen in his temple, even he who is your general expectation and joy, and in whom the covenant of grace is ratified.

2 But who may abide the day of his coming? and who shall stand when he appeareth? for he is like a refiner's fire, and like fullers' sope.

3 And he shall sit as a refiner and purifier of silver: and he shall purify the sons of Levi, and purge them as gold and silver, that they may offer unto the Lord an offering in righteousness.

4 Then shall the offering of Judah and Jerusalem be pleasant unto the Lord, as in the days of old, and as in former years.
able, as any that ever were offered up by the holiest patriarchs or purest ages of worshippers heretofore.

1. The wicked reflections made by some (ch. ii. 17.) shall be proved to have no ground. For, notwithstanding miracles and other prophets cease, yet I will in

due time send one, more than any prophet, even John Baptist, as a harbinger before me; and the Messiah shall be seen in his temple, even he who is your general expectation and joy, and in whom the covenant of grace is ratified.

2. But that coming of his will be a very trying time, and make plain distinctions between the wicked and righteous, the hypocritical and sincere.

3. Thus shall he by his doctrine, at his first coming, purify men from their dross, and qualify them for serving God acceptably, by an offering, the use whereof shall never be abolished.

4. The services and devotions of his church shall then be pure and acceptable, as any that ever were offered up by the holiest patriarchs or purest ages of worshippers heretofore.

5 *And I will come near to you to judgment; and I will be a swift witness against the sorcerers, and against the adulterers, and against false swearers, and against those that oppress the hireling in his wages, the widow, and the fatherless, and that turn aside the stranger from his right, and fear not me, saith the Lord of hosts.*

5. Of all which so strict an account shall be taken, and punishments so exemplary inflicted on the wicked and profane, that none shall then have occasion to say, as some now scoffingly do, (ch. ii. 17,) *Where is the God of judgment?*

COMMENT.

WHAT differences soever the Jews, or other infidels, may make in the interpretation of this prophecy, Christians, who acknowledge the authority of the New Testament, can remain under no reasonable doubt to whom it should be applied. The very words are quoted by three several evangelists^b. And the messenger mentioned here to go before the face of the Lord is by our blessed Saviour himself declared to be John the Baptist^c. This is the forerunner, referred to in the fourth chapter under the title of Elias^d; and (as hath been largely proved heretofore^e) means not the very person of that prophet, but one whose resemblance to his character and circumstances was reason sufficient for foretelling him under that name.

As little ground can any, who considers the scriptures here referred to, have to question whether the Lord, whose face this messenger was sent before, be the Messiah. But in regard the scriptures take notice of a twofold coming of the Messiah, it cannot but be proper to inquire whether of those two may be concerned in this prediction. Tho' rather, because some passages before us have been thought a very lively description of some circumstances with which we are elsewhere informed his second shall be attended, but not so naturally to belong to those of his first coming.

Such in particular are that question, *Who may abide the day of his coming, or be able to stand when he appeareth?*^f The comparing him to a *refiner's fire and fullers' sope*^g; the description of his *sitting like a refiner and purifier of silver*; and the threatening that he shall *come to judgment*^h, and *be a swift witness* against several enormous crimes specified in the close of the scripture now before us.

But, all this notwithstanding, I suppose it will be looked upon as sufficient evidence for this prophecy relating to the Messiah's first advent, if it can be made appear (1) that even these passages are very applicable to this; and then that they stand intermixed with some others, which must needs belong to this only.

1. First, therefore, I shall endeavour to prove that even those passages already mentioned, which seem most to incline to Christ's second, are very applicable to his former coming.

By the day and coming of Christ we are to understand, not only

^b Mark i. 2; Matt. xi. 10, 11; Luke vii. 27.

^c Matt. xi. 13, 14; xvii. 12, 13.

^d Luke i. 17; comp. Mal. iv. 5.

^e See Gospel for the fourth Sunday in Advent.

^f Mal. iii. 2.

^g Ver. 3.

^h Ver. 5.

his appearance to the world, but all the memorable changes and events to which that appearance should minister occasion. Hence some interpreters have applied those phrases here, which speak of *purifying* and *refining*, to the doctrine and grace of Christ. Both which, it is plain, meet with mankind in a condition but too like a mixed mass, embased with great quantities of dross, or like a garment sullied with many filthy stains. To these the word and the Spirit perform the offices of *fire* and *sops*, by separating the refuse from the good, and purging out those spots which have been contracted by natural infirmities or evil customs. The word is serviceable to these purposes, by instructing us how and why this cleansing must be made: and the grace attending a right use of that word is so, by disposing the mind to follow such instruction, and conveying such strength against frailties and temptations, as may enable men to make that change effectually. But both these advantages are manifestly owing, the one to the preaching and institution, the other to the merit and power of Christ at his first appearance; and may therefore be fitly implied (as effects in their cause) by that coming, and that day of his.

Thus again our Lord may be said to *come to judgment* against the several sorts of criminals mentioned at the fifth verse; as those sins are more expressly condemned; the account men must expect to render for them more fully and clearly denounced; and the eternity of those punishments in a future state, to which the guilty committers render themselves obnoxious, made more manifest by the doctrine of the gospel than ever had been done before. For this destroys all those false confidences which wicked people are so apt to support themselves withal; and gives fair warning that (any promiscuous distributions of Providence in the present state of things, any impunity or prosperity here below notwithstanding) God hath reserved to himself a future and severe reckoning, and will not fail, at his own appointed time, to *repay sinners to their face*.

But if this interpretation be agreeable to the doctrine of Christ, considered in itself; it is much more so, when we take into the argument the particular circumstances of planting and propagating that doctrine. Now these are sufficiently known to have been so calamitous, that the afflictions and persecutions which every believer was, for the sake of his profession, unavoidably exposed to, proved a severe trial of his sincerity and zeal. Hence it is that we find *taking up our cross* so often insisted upon as a necessary qualification of becoming Christ's disciples: hence that necessary advice to act in this matter like wise warriors and provident builders¹, by making beforehand a right judgment of our strength, and computing the cost of our undertaking: that is, to weigh seriously the conditions upon which the advantages of this religion are offered to us; and to see whether, upon a fair stating of the whole account, we think it worth our while to forego all other interests for the sake of Christ and a good conscience. Hence again, the becoming Christians is so often expressed by following Christ; and that in such terms as plainly import our duty of imi-

¹ Luke xiv. 27, 32.

tating his example, not only in the innocency of his life, but also in the meekness and constancy of his sufferings and his death. And indeed the whole manner of our Saviour's conversation upon earth, the poverty, the contumely, the pains he chose to endure, had this among other wise and gracious ends—to teach all those who profess to be his disciples that he was their pattern no less than their instructor, and that they who aspire after a part in his glories must not think much to climb up thither by the same rugged steps in which he hath led the way.

This we know was manifestly and universally the case for some hundreds of years. And it seems to have agreed with the expectation of the Jews, who are said to have made *the pangs of the Messiah* a proverbial expression for the severest afflictions; and frequently to use a traditional saying, almost the same literally with that of Malachi here, ver. 2, *Alas! who shall live with those great calamities which shall be seen in the last* (that is, according to the common import of the word, in the Messiah's) *days?*

Now it is plain that a doctrine planted with such circumstances left no room for hypocrisy or worldly considerations. Here was no temptation to dissemble, no place for receiving it otherwise than upon principle; and if any had come in with an inconsiderate zeal, trials were daily and hourly at hand: such as would not fail to prove their sincerity in a manner abundantly justifying the comparisons of *fullers' sope* and *the refiner's fire*. And indeed the whole scheme and temper of Christianity is so contrived, that even the most quiet and peaceable profession of it requires a weaning our affections from the world, a restraint of all sensual appetites, a fixed desire and love of future and heavenly good things, and a resignation of mind disposed and resolved to do and suffer any thing to which the providence of God shall appoint us. So that the first coming of Christ which established this religion, may, upon all those accounts, be very properly intended by those figurative descriptions of *trying* and *purifying* the hearts of men, which the prophet was here directed to express himself by.

But there is yet another account, wherein the Jews were more immediately concerned, I mean the destruction of their city by the Romans, and all the miseries attending it. This is, by many expositors, understood to be the finishing act of Christ's first advent. It was a punishment evidently inflicted on that people for their obstinate unbelief and barbarous treatment of him. It hath, in a former part of this treatise^k, been observed most probably to fulfil the prediction in the close of the fourth chapter. And the unparalleled calamities of that dispensation, the astonishing discrimination made by it, the utter ruin of the unbelieving part, and the safety and deliverance of the believing part of the inhabitants, recorded in the story of that dismallest of all tragedies, do so exactly come up to the scripture now at hand, that every syllable of this prediction in the third chapter seems to have been punctually accomplished upon that occasion.

Let thus much suffice for the former part of my argument, that the prophecy we are considering relates to Christ's *first* advent; be-

^k See Gospel for the fourth Sunday in Advent.

cause even those passages which seem chiefly to incline to the second, are very fairly applicable to this first. I now proceed to the other branch of the argument, which undertakes to shew that the first is the coming of Christ meant here; because there are several other passages relating to the same matter, and intermixed with those already mentioned, which do not seem capable of being applied to any coming but this only.

1. The first of these is, that the Lord should come *suddenly*. Which refers, not to the time of uttering this prophecy, but to that of the messenger being sent before his face. And thus we know in fact it was. For the history of the New Testament (that all possible right might be done to this circumstance) is particularly careful to acquaint us that our blessed Saviour was born six months after the Baptist: and not only so, but that both of them entered upon their public ministry at much about the same distance of time from each other. So truly did the one prepare the way, so suddenly did the other follow; whether we regard their first appearance in the world, or their setting out in their respective characters and functions. And thus you see of what weight the particular time of John's birth and the year of his beginning to preach repentance is, which St. Luke gives so exact an account of; and what light it reflects back upon the prophecy before us. Which, after having learned from Christ himself that John was pointed at by it, leaves us under no manner of difficulty, either who the Lord spoken of here is, or what coming of his the prophet had in view.

2. A second circumstance is that of coming to *his temple*. Which agrees with another place in Haggai, where those who beheld how much the second temple was inferior to the first in point of magnificence are comforted with a promise that the Lord would fill that house with glory, that the glory of the latter house should be greater than of the former, and in that place he would give peace¹. Now all the accounts given of the second temple do represent it so very unequal to the first, not only in point of structure and ornament, but especially in respect of several methods of revelation and marks of God's more especial presence, that it must needs have been (according to the prophet's expression^m) in all men's eyes in comparison of that as nothing. Those passages have obliged, not only the generality of Christians, but several very learned Jewish expositors, to interpret Haggai of Messiah's personal presence in the temple then spoken of; as the only manifestation of Divine favour that could fill up the character given there; that should exalt the glory of this house so high, and justify that pompous introduction of *shaking the heavens and the earth, the sea and the dry land*. Expressions usual in the prophetic style to denote very surprising and important revolutions.

And now come hither, and behold the predictions I am speaking of beginning to be fulfilled this very day. For then first did the only begotten Son of God visit his temple in substance of our flesh; when, in compliance with the law of the firstborn, he was presented there by his holy mother, as the Gospel for this festival relates. And this

¹ Haggai ii. 7, 8, 9.

^m Ver. 3.

accomplishment old Simeon seems plainly to acknowledge, who by Divine impulse adores the Divine goodness and truth upon this occasion; and tells his mother (in words of great affinity to those of Malachi already considered), *Behold, this child is set for the fall and rising again of many in Israel, and for a sign which shall be spoken against, that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed*^a.

Hither, at twelve years old, he repaired to hear and confer with the doctors, and told his parents they had found him in the place where his business properly lay^b. Here, at the first passover of his ministry, he began to exert his zeal^c and assert his authority by driving out the buyers and sellers that profaned it. Here, as oft as he resorted to Jerusalem, he held conferences, wrought miracles, and taught daily^d. Hither he was conducted with hosannas as to his proper palace; to which he declared his right by again purging it of them who *made his Father's house an house of merchandise*^e. And of this he did with tears foretell the utter and irreparable ruin. Which, about forty years afterwards, was so strictly verified, as evidently to confine the prophecy now before us to such an advent of the Messiah as found the temple actually standing. The necessity whereof is so evident, even to the adversaries of our faith, who believe the Messiah not yet come, that they are forced to take refuge in a fanciful dream of a third temple yet to be built. Which yet, were it any where but in their own imagination, would prove a vain refuge; since no other can reasonably be supposed to answer the design of these prophets but that very temple then in being, when their prophecies were dictated to and delivered by them.

3. Another passage confining us to Christ's *first* coming is the character given in those words, *The Messenger of the covenant whom ye delight in*. The former part exactly suits with all the gracious methods he submitted to, both in his life and death, for the redemption of mankind, for the reconciliation of sinners to his Father (in this sense fulfilling that clause of the promise in Haggai, *in this place will I give peace, saith the Lord of hosts*^f), and by his mediation ratifying (as the author to the Hebrews expresses it^g) a new and *better covenant established upon better promises*. Meanwhile that author joins the new covenant and the blood of sprinkling together^h; and having, by many undeniable arguments, proved that the whole of this federal transaction was finished in the blood shed upon the cross, does abundantly instruct us how the title here is to be applied. Namely, that he, who is most strictly the Messenger of a covenant, when sent from God to strike and confirm it by his own death, cannot with any propriety be so called at a coming designed to make a nice inquiry into the observance, and dreadfully to punish the wicked violations of that covenant.

The same is also a natural consequence of the different resentments men are said to have of these two different comings. With regard to the former, he is here styled the *Delight* of the Jews, and in Haggai, *the Desire of all nations*ⁱ. And accordingly at the first completion of

^a Luke ii. 35—35.

Luke xix. 47.

^b Haggai ii. 7.

^c Ver. 46—49.

^d Matt. xxi. xxi.

^e Haggai ii. 9.

^f John ii. 13, &c.

^g Heb. viii. 6.

^h Ch. xii. 24.

ⁱ Jobu v, vii, viii, ix;

this prophecy, Simeon is described as one eminent for justice and devotion, and *that waited for the consolation of Israel*¹. This consolation appears from the following words to have been the Lord's Christ. Whom having been assured by revelation that he should see before his death, he took the child Jesus in his arms, blessed God for his mercy and truth to him, and expressed the abundant cause of his and the world's joy in that short pious hymn, fitly repeated in our daily Evening Service. To the same purpose the Gospel for the day takes notice of a prophetess present at the same time, who *gave thanks unto the Lord, and spake of this child to all them that looked for redemption in Jerusalem*². These instances may serve to shew both a general expectation and desire of the Messiah about that time, and a mighty satisfaction in them who believed him then come. But how very distant from these the apprehensions and passions of men will be at his second coming, let the same evangelist say, who from our Lord's own mouth represents it by a season of general *distress of nations and perplexity, when men's hearts shall fail them for fear, and for looking after those things that are coming on the earth*³. Wide extremes indeed! but reasonable both; for who can without a sensible joy reflect upon that first coming, upon which the salvation of a whole world depends; or who can look forward to the *second* without dread, in which, if the *first* had not opened a passage for mercy to come in and temper judgment, no flesh living could possibly have been justified?

4. Once more. *Purifying the Levites, and rendering the offerings in Judah and Jerusalem acceptable, as in the days of old*, are likewise descriptions very proper for Christ's *first*, but not at all applicable to his *second* coming. The Levites were literally purified, who in great numbers early embraced the Christian faith; or, by an easy figure, they that minister in holy things under the gospel might be thus entitled: and the spiritual sacrifices of prayer and praise, and men's persons devoted to the service of God, are those acceptable ones, which in the church of Christ, the spiritual Judah and Jerusalem, are now and shall continue to be offered with the same and even greater simplicity and plainness than was exercised by the old patriarchs, before the introducing of that pomp of ceremonies prescribed by the Mosaic institution. But none of these things will square with the coming of Christ to judgment; for probation ends where retribution begins. And no place then is left for doing any more to serve or please God; but all that remains is, to *receive according to the things already done in the body, whether it be good or bad*⁴.

By this time, I hope, my reader may have attained a competent understanding of the prophecy now under consideration; of the proper design and completion of it; and of our Church's wisdom in recommending it to our meditation on the day when it first began to be fulfilled. I only add, that as the Collect for this festival teaches us to confess, so does this scripture give us fair intimations of the twofold nature and distinct personality of Jesus Christ. For that Lord whose the temple of Jerusalem was could be no other than very God.

¹ Luke ii. 25.² Ver. 28.³ Ch. xxi. 26, 27.⁴ 2 Cor. v. 10.

The messenger is plainly distinguished from the person who sent him : and the messenger of a covenant, so made and ratified as hath been explained, must needs have been man *in the substance of our flesh*. To this Son therefore, God-man, together with the Father and the Holy Ghost, the one true God, let us most thankfully ascribe all honour and praise, thanksgiving and adoration, henceforth and for evermore. Amen.

THE GOSPEL. St. Luke ii. 22.

22 *And when the days of her purification according to the law of Moses were accomplished, they brought him to Jerusalem, to present him to the Lord ;*

23 *(As it is written in the law of the Lord, Every male that openeth the womb shall be called holy to the Lord ;)*

24 *And to offer a sacrifice according to that which is said in the law of the Lord, A pair of turtledoves, or two young pigeons.*

25 *And, behold, there was a man in Jerusalem, whose name was Simeon ; and the same man was just and devout, waiting for the consolation of Israel : and the Holy Ghost was upon him.*
weight, by reason of his knowledge in the traditions of the Jews, all which were then

26 *And it was revealed unto him by the Holy Ghost, that he should not see death, before he had seen the Lord's Christ.*
assured he should have the happiness of seeing the so much longed for Messiah.

27 *And he came by the Spirit into the temple : and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him after the custom of the law,*

28 *Then took he him up in his arms, and blessed God, and said,*

29 *Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word :*
comfort which thou hadst

30 *For mine eyes have seen thy salvation,*

31 *Which thou hast prepared before the face of all people ;*

32 *A light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of thy people Israel.*

33 *And Joseph and his mother mar-*

22, 23, 24. The days appointed in Levit. xii. See the Comment.

25. This Simeon was son of Hillel, an eminent doctor among the Jews, and father to the famous Gamaliel. His testimony is of greater weight, by reason of his knowledge in the prophetic writings and traditions of the Jews, all which were then allowed to denote the Messiah's coming about that time.

26. God gave to him a prophetic spirit upon this occasion, by which he was assured he should have the happiness of seeing the so much longed for Messiah.

27. By the direction of that Spirit it was that he came at that time to the temple, and broke out into the following hymn of praise.

29. I acknowledge now myself to have received the comfort which thou hadst promised me before my death.

31. A salvation not confined to any one people, but—

33, 34. Then Simeon pro-

called at those things which were spoken of him.

34 *And Simeon blessed them, and said unto Mary his mother, Behold, this child is set for the fall and rising again of many in Israel; and for a sign which shall be spoken against;*

particularly all Jews, where it would be first offered; yet the different reception given to it would tend to the condemnation of some and the benefit of others. And the contradiction and calumny this bringer of it should meet with would be a test to discover the sincerity and tempers of men.

35 *(Yea, a sword shall pierce through thy own soul also,) that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed.*

36 *And there was one Anna, a prophetess, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Aser: she was of a great age, and had lived with an husband seven years from her virginity;*

37 *And she was a widow of about fourscore and four years, which departed not from the temple, but served God with fastings and prayers night and day.*

38 *And she coming in that instant gave thanks likewise unto the Lord, and spake of him to all them that looked for redemption in Jerusalem.*

39 *And when they had performed all things according to the law of the Lord, they returned into Galilee, to their own city Nazareth.*

the death of Herod. And then they came back (by a fresh admonition from an angel) and settled at Nazareth: compare Matt. ii. 13. to the end.

40 *And the child grew, and waxed strong in spirit, filled with wisdom: and the grace of God was upon him.*

ceeded to foretell how different the events would be of this wonderful child coming into the world. For though the salvation brought by him were capable of extending to all, and particu-

37. Eighty-four years' old, continuing a widow after a married state, and a constant attendant upon the

public service at the usual hours of prayer, as also a strict observer of the customary fasting days.

38. She also declared this child to be the person from whom the redemption they looked for by all the devout was to be had.

39. After this they intended to return home; but an angel warned them to flee into Egypt till after the

flee into Egypt till after the death of Herod. And then they came back (by a fresh admonition from an angel) and settled at Nazareth: compare Matt. ii. 13. to the end.

COMMENT.

THE festival celebrated by the Christian church this day is designed to perpetuate the memory of two very remarkable actions shortly after our Saviour's birth. Both which the evangelist thought necessary to be mentioned expressly; and the rather, because they were both done in obedience to the law. The punctual fulfilling whereof was a matter of such moment, that not only the behaviour of his parents is taken notice of, but the precepts themselves are parti-

cularly referred to, that so their conformity to them might be the more conspicuous. All this the three first verses of the Gospel contain. In treating of this subject, I will speak to each action distinctly, and in both I shall consider

First, the law itself :

Secondly, the compliance with it in this case : and

Thirdly, the reflections and improvements fit for us to make from it.

I begin with that action which relates to the mother. Not only because it commonly gives title to this day, which is from hence called *the Purification of the Blessed Virgin*, but because it must needs have been first in the order of the thing. For hereby the happy mother gained her restoration to the house and worship of God, and could not be admitted to present her son till the performance of this service had opened her a free passage into the temple.

Now the law concerning this matter is contained in the twelfth chapter of Leviticus. Whereby it is ordained, that a woman, after bearing of children, should continue in a state which the law termed unclean for a certain number of days. Seven days in such a manner that all conversation or contact polluted them that approached her ; and these are therefore called days of separation ; and three and thirty days more, which amount to forty in the whole, to be debarred from the service of the tabernacle, and joining with the rest of the congregation. This was the rule for a woman that had brought a son ; and the time was double for a daughter. At the expiration of this term, she was commanded to bring a burnt offering and a sin offering ; which wiped out that stain the law laid upon her, and restored her to all the purity and privileges of her brethren, who were a people sanctified to the Lord. This was to be given into the hands of the priest at the door of the tabernacle ; and his offering it in her behalf is there said to make an atonement for her, and to cleanse her. Which done, she was no longer confined to wait at the door, (where she gave her sacrifice to the priest in token of her being excluded, till the oblation and acceptance of that had gained her admission farther,) but had thenceforward free access to the house and worship of God, and enjoyed all the advantages belonging to a true Israelite.

One thing more I am obliged to take notice of with regard to this sacrifice ; which is, that the burnt offering differed, according to the quality and circumstances of the person ; but the sin offering was in effect the same. For whereas the fifth verse of that chapter prescribes a lamb of the first year for a burnt offering, and a young pigeon or a turtledove for a sin offering ; in consideration that this expense might be too burdensome upon those of a meaner condition, God grants a dispensation to the poor at the eighth verse there, and orders, that if the woman be insufficient for the charge of a lamb, then she shall bring two turtles, or two young pigeons, the one for the burnt offering, and the other for the sin offering. Accordingly this part of the law is quoted by St. Luke, as best agreeing with the virgin's fortunes. A further evidence still of infinite humility and condescension in the Son of the high God, who did not only not disdain a mother, but not a mother of so low degree.

Thus stands the law. And if we would be satisfied of the reasons and true intent of it, we shall do well to consider it in its natural, civil, and religious capacity.

The natural reason of this separation seems to be, the allowing a time of rest and ease for women to recover their strength; and to heal those bruises of our first parents' fall, which are still upon these occasions felt with great grief and hazard. This, together with the prevention of mischiefs upon posterity, if no such separation were observed, might be ground sufficient in nature for this law. Which latter may also be allowed for a civil and politic reason of the institution.

But the chief and religious meaning no doubt was, to be a restraint upon carnal and wanton desires; to put men in mind of that blemish and pollution which our nature is tainted with; and that, as David says, *every one of us was shapen in wickedness; and in sin did our mothers conceive us*^c. All which was shadowed by the Levitical uncleanness, and the sacrifices ordained to purge it away. For although nothing can be a true and proper defilement but sin; and it is most certain that no diseases or weaknesses of nature are sin; yet had these, under the Mosaic dispensation, a moral meaning couched under them, which the observors of the external ordinance were obliged principally to regard. Those uncleannesses were carnal only, and not spiritual; and when we read of sin offerings for them, we must not so mistake the matter, as if those offerings were necessary to expiate any real guilt, or able to do it, if any such had been contracted. For such pollutions in truth were no more than legal incapacities, and the atonement made for them was only for restoring the benefits of external communion, and declaring them duly qualified members of the Jewish church. This was the true state of the case. But it is true withal, that though these things did not immediately and necessarily imply sin, yet they had a constant and remote regard to it. For all those impurities, which were merely ceremonial, did signify and mystically represent something that was morally and substantially evil. Thus much is fit to be observed concerning the uncleanness and the sin offering mentioned in the law. But for the burnt offering, that, being a sacrifice of praise, is of a different consideration. And the acknowledgments expressed by it will always be a debt to God, so long as mankind are brought into the world with pain and anguish, and as it is a mercy to poor travailing mothers to be delivered from extreme sorrow, and preserved in extreme danger.

2. And now, after what hath been spoken to the law itself, the nature and reasons of it, we shall find less difficulty in forming a right judgment of my second particular, which concerns the blessed Virgin's compliance with this command. The matter of fact is here related at large; that she stayed till *the days of her purification, according to the law of Moses, were accomplished*; (which, reckoning from the nativity of Christ till this feast, make up the just term of forty days, appointed after the birth of a man child;) that then she came up to

Jerusalem to offer a sacrifice, says the four and twentieth verse. Which had not (as some have understood it) any respect at all to her Son, or the redemption of the firstborn, but (as appears plainly from the original law already insisted upon) concerned herself alone. The pair of turtledoves, or two young pigeons, being the burnt and the sin offering, appointed for the purification of such persons after childbirth as could not afford a more costly oblation. Thus we are sufficiently assured that the mother of Jesus did in all respects act according to the law. The only doubt upon this occasion is, whether or no, or how far, she was obliged so to do; if it were an act of duty and obedience, or rather of condescension and voluntary compliance. For some interpreters have contended for the one, and some for the other, of these opinions. And yet both may be reconciled, and (all circumstances carefully considered) each are truly said to be in some sense in the right.

The birth of our blessed Saviour was so perfectly different from that of common men, that it must be granted his mother could not possibly be comprehended within the reason of the law. The conception of this son by an operation of almighty power, totally mysterious and divine, left no place at all for any reflections upon the usual corruption of original sin. Nor was she in reality, in any degree, subject to so much as a legal uncleanness upon this account. And so far it is most true that she was under no obligation to the law, nor within the intent of it. But yet, since her being a mother was sufficiently notorious, notwithstanding her being such in a manner so much above nature was a secret, not yet ripe for discovery; since it was thought convenient that her husband Joseph should for some time pass for Jesus his father in common reputation; she was within the letter of the law. And fit it was she should submit, as the known mother of a son, to the ceremonies expected from her. Nor was this all. For though the sin offering were not in strictness due in any sense, yet she lay under the same legal incapacity in the eye of the world, and must be restored to the temple by it. And though the burnt offering was not due, as that of other parents, to commemorate a deliverance from pangs and danger; yet never sure were thanks so justly due for any son as this; never from any mother, as from her, who had the honour to bring forth her own and the world's God and Saviour, the blessing and the expectation of all the earth. Add to this, that the first proffers of salvation being tendered to the Jews, and the old law about to be abolished by Christ, it was necessary that no circumstance should be omitted which might minister occasion of offence. He was *made of a woman, made under the law*^d; and therefore obliged to satisfy the law, before he became capable of redeeming them that were under it. As therefore he was circumcised in his own person, though the mystical and moral part of circumcision had nothing to do with him; so his mother submitted to all the purifications of any other Israelitish woman, though she partook not in any degree of the infirmities and pollutions common to other births. Thus even the most rigorous Jew might seek, and not be able in any in-

stances, to convince him of sin, or contempt of the Mosaic institution.

3. I come now, in the third place, to raise some proper inferences from what hath been said, and then this point shall be dismissed.

And here, first, give me leave to observe to you the decency as well as the antiquity of those thanksgivings after childbirth which are practised and directed by our wise and holy Liturgy in that Service commonly called *The Churching of Women*. What God ordained under the old law you have already seen. But that the order we prescribe may not be mistaken for Jewish superstition, I shall show you particularly how the church hath most prudently distinguished between the ceremonial and moral part of that law. Which indeed is a thing that deserves to be well attended to; and the want of it hath ministered occasion to infinite sins and scruples. For though the ritual part of Moses's law must not be retained, because that would overthrow the righteousness of faith; yet the moral part must not be discarded upon pretence of Judaism, because this is not peculiar to the race of Israel, but common to all mankind. This is not the ordinance of a temporal commandment, but of eternal duration and virtue. Now the readiest way to judge aright of such matters is to examine into the nature of the command. And so far as the reason and substance of that holds, so much of that command does and always will oblige us. To make this more plain, I shall instance in the case before us. The bringing children into the world is what the commonness of it hath made men look upon without astonishment; but, did not use render it familiar, we could scarce forbear extolling it as a most convincing proof of an almighty and wonderful good Providence. Since therefore the pain and the danger was not peculiar to the state and nation of the Jews, it is certain the thanksgivings for being delivered from them ought not to be so neither. And consequently, because the peril is universal the praise should be universal.

Thankfulness then is as much the duty of Christian women as ever it could be of the Israelitish. And so is the returning those thanks in the public congregation too: because the blessings and benefits of communion, and the houses of God, are as sacred with us as ever they could be under Moses. Consequently both the advantage of our being restored to these is as valuable, and the interest our brethren and fellow-members have in our safety is as great and tender, as that of the Levitical assemblies could possibly be. We do not indeed pretend to debar people admittance upon any pretence of pollution; for we know that marriage is honourable, and the children of Christians are a holy seed. We prescribe no number of days, but leave that to custom and conveniency; and, would health and decency permit, should not scruple to receive them the very next day into our churches. We expect no sin offering, nor a lamb for a burnt offering, because all bloody sacrifices ended in Christ. But though the uncleanness and the precise number of days, though the forbidding access till that period be expired, and the sacrifices enjoined by Moses be done away in Christ; yet thanksgiving and public praise is not nor ever will be done away. And if the lamb or the turtles be no longer the ex-

pressions of those thanks, yet there is something which answers, which indeed excels them. And this is the offering to them who still live upon God's revenue; and the yet better offering of themselves a holy and living sacrifice to God. To which purpose it is that our Church in her rubric does not only command the accustomed offerings to be paid to the priest, but advises the person then church'd to receive the Communion. All which shews how decent this custom is; how unfit the office is to be performed in private houses; how agreeable the whole institution to the general design of the thing; which is, to bless God for restoring persons to their strength, and the opportunities of waiting upon him in his own house, where indeed their first visits are due.

And now, if I might presume to add any thing more from the law, it should be this: that as among the Jews those who were poor brought a dove or a pigeon only, but they of greater substance brought a lamb for a burnt offering; so now, though the poorer sort may well content themselves with paying those duties, from which none are (and, if men rightly understood it, none would be) excused, yet it were well if persons of a better condition presented a lamb, that is, besides what law and custom makes necessary, if they gave of their own freewill somewhat to piety and charity upon these occasions. For the poor are God's receivers also; and what is done to them being accepted as done to Christ, every contribution to their relief is truly offering a sacrifice.

These are institutions so well grounded, ceremonies so becoming, directions so profitable, that none but they who are very ill-disposed or very ignorant will quarrel at them; nor any but the insensible and ungrateful grudge to perform them. For sure, according to the Psalm appointed for this service, *When God hath so signally delivered your souls from death, your eyes from tears, and your feet from falling, you must needs think yourselves obliged to walk before the Lord in the land of the living: and since you have no reward to give unto the Lord for all the benefits he hath done unto you; the least you can possibly do is to receive the cup of salvation, to call upon his name, and cheerfully to pay your vows in the courts of his own house, and in the presence of all his people*.

I have insisted upon this perhaps longer than I needed; but the digression, if it be one, may have its usefulness. And I would omit no occasion to convince my readers of the wisdom of our Church, the fitness and the excellency of her offices, the admirable order and beauty and usefulness of all our Common Prayer. But to return,

Secondly, another inference which may be raised from this action is that of charity, or care not to give offence. For as the blessed Virgin submitted to those ordinances, the reason and foundation whereof did not concern her, and seemed to wash away those stains which in reality never were contracted; so it will very well become us to practise the like humility and condescension. Not to act morosely, and shew ourselves rigorous over much, in insisting upon our privileges and exemptions, but to perform good offices cheerfully and liberally; to comply in some cases with the mistakes and infirmities of

our brethren, and though our consciences be never so well persuaded in the point of Christian liberty, yet, for the sake of others, the not provoking them to scandal, the maintaining our authority with them, the securing their good opinion, and the like; to forego and deny ourselves many freedoms, and be content to perform many things which are not in strictness required of us.

The necessity of this would soon appear, were it but once duly considered how much opinion and example bear sway in the world, and what invincible bars prejudice puts to all the good we can do or say. Indeed, with regard to religion, the success of it depends very much upon the prudence and dexterous management of the persons that recommend it. And St. Paul himself hath preferred *charity* before *knowledge*¹, for this very reason, because the one renders a man stiff and conceited of himself; whereas the other studies by all means to *promote the edification of our brethren*. And, generally speaking, the first step towards edifying any man is to conciliate his favour and be well in his esteem. For there are few people so void of partiality as to suffer themselves to be profited by one of whom they have conceived a mean or an ill opinion. The omitting of circumcision in the son, and of purification in the mother, might be allowable and harmless in the sight of God, and in the ground of the precepts themselves; but could the Jews have had that objection, and represented Jesus as profane, this would have done more mischief to his preaching than all the malice of his enemies besides. Accordingly we find the scribes and Pharisees perpetually catching at this handle; and our Saviour as industrious to vindicate himself. As being very sensible that his adversaries could not more effectually carry their point than by having him believed a breaker and a contemner of the law; and that to urge his own prerogative and exemption from the law would by no means do his business, nor satisfy the world with his conduct, though that was most innocent in itself, and the reasons that justified it were irrefragable. The case indeed should not be so; for reason, and not affection, ought to determine us. But we must be content to deal with mankind as we find them. And thus it is but too manifest, that to render our discourses persuasive, it does not suffice that they be true, for, alas! the passions must be won, as well as the understanding convinced.

Thirdly, before I leave this head quite, I would gladly offer some short observations from the sacrifices appointed by the law upon such occasions.

And here we may take notice, first, that the constant manner of thanking God for his mercies used to be by dedicating somewhat to pious and charitable uses.

Secondly, that in this the poor were not totally excused, but obliged to do something, though it were but small. So that God shewed that he required as well as accepted the widow's mite; and that, where *there is a willing mind*, the offering would be always interpreted (as the apostle says) *according to what a man hath, and not according to what he hath not* ².

Thirdly, that though the turtle was accepted, yet it was only there where a lamb could not be extended to. From whence we are to gather, that God expects our charity should hold proportion with our estates; and that they who have much ought to be rich in good works, to give in plenty, and distribute with gladness.

Lastly, the sin offering here being the same with poor and rich, shews, that though our condition in the world require some difference in our alms, yet it makes none in our repentance; that all, equal in the degree of guilt, are in this regard equal with God also; that he respects no man's person; but high and low, rich and poor, are redeemed with the same price, are obliged to make the same satisfactions, and that their souls are of the same value with the heavenly Judge and the common Father of the spirits of all flesh. These and some other reflections of the like nature are proper to be gathered from the sacrifice mentioned here to be brought by the mother of our Lord for her purification.

I pass now to the second act recorded by St. Luke, and commemorated by the church at this festival, which is, presenting our Lord in the temple. And here again we will take a brief view of the law, the obedience paid to it, and the inferences it suggests to us.

As to the command itself, first, I shall consider the several passages where it is to be found; that so, by the occasions and the contexts compared together, we may be able to make some tolerable judgment of the foundations whereon it is built, and the extent and importance of it.

The first in which it occurs to us is the thirteenth of Exodus at the second. There, upon the Israelites' departure out of Egypt, *the Lord spake unto Moses, saying, Sanctify unto me all the firstborn. Whatsoever openeth the womb among the children of Israel, both of man and beast, it is mine.* And to take away all doubt what might be the meaning of such a ceremony, God himself has interpreted it, ver. 14, 15, by directing their posterity to be taught thus among the elements of their religion: *It shall be when thy son asketh thee in time to come, What is this? that thou shalt say unto him, By strength of hand the Lord brought us out of Egypt from the house of bondage. And it came to pass when Pharaoh would hardly let us go, that the Lord slew all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, both the firstborn of man and the firstborn of beasts; therefore I sacrifice to the Lord all that openeth the matrix being males: but all the firstborn of my children I redeem.*

Now as the sabbath is said in one place to have been instituted for a commemoration of God's rest from the works of the creation, and in another to remind the Israelites of their own rest from the toils and tyranny of Egypt; so the precept now before us, though it had a great and more especial regard to the deliverance of Israel by the destruction of the firstborn, yet it seems not to have been so absolutely confined to this as not to have had other ends and meanings too. For the next time we meet with it (at Exodus xxii. 29) in company with the law of first-fruits in general: *Thou shalt not delay to offer the first of thy ripe fruits, and of thy liquors; the firstborn of thy sons shalt thou give unto me.* That command of first-fruits seems to have

been one of those imposed for the prevention of idolatry. For where-as it was customary with the heathens to sacrifice of their new pro-duct to the sun, or Ceres, or Isis, or the like, the Jews are required to continue the thing, but to change the object. An intimation that these services were due, though not to any of these vain imaginary deities, yet to the one true God. In the meanwhile the grounds of this worship were the same to the Jew and Gentile both. For both dedicated these fruits to express their thanks, and as an acknowledg-ment that all they enjoyed came from a hand above them; and there-fore in gratitude they blessed the Author of their plenty, and gave him back by way of tribute a part of his own again. All the pagan rites speaking in effect those words put into the mouth of every Israelite at this solemnity—*And now, behold, I have brought the first-fruits of the land, which thou, O Lord, hast given me*^b.

2. The acceptance of this oblation was that which sanctified and gave them a title to all the rest; and that person was looked upon as guilty of the boldest impiety and sacrilege, who without it pre-sumed to use or enjoy any of those possessions. This was injustice and usurpation till that debt were first satisfied. Insomuch that some heathen writers, when they describe a profane person, and one that had abandoned all sense of God and goodness, do it by calling him *a man that offered no first-fruits*^c. Among the Jews it was also sup-posed to take off the pollution and curse of the wicked land they succeeded into, and to render their possessions (as the language of that dispensation then spoke) clean unto them.

Again, thirdly, this offering, as it published their thanks to the Giver of every good gift, and was supposed to sanctify what they already enjoyed, so was it looked upon as an effectual invitation of a blessing, and a sure earnest of plenty for the time to come. Many services of this kind being urged in the law itself with this motive—*That the Lord thy God may bless thee in all thou puttest thy hand unto*^d. And long experience of such men's prosperity drew this advice from the wisest of men^e—*Honour the Lord with thy substance, and with the first-fruits of all thy increase; so shall thy barns be filled with plenty, and thy presses shall burst out with new wine*.

Now since children and the fruit of the womb are an heritage and gift that cometh of the Lord^f; since his blessing alone increases man-kind; and the happiness of parents and families, and indeed of the world in general, depends so much upon the goodness and the number of the persons born into it; no man can doubt but there are the same acknowledgments justly owing, and the same kind influences of Provi-dence as zealously to be sought, in this as in any other part of our fortunes. Therefore God might lay a tribute upon, and reserve to himself a part of, this increase also. And it is reasonable to believe he did it upon this more extensive account; and that he chose the *firstborn son*, because this was reputed the best and most valuable; as Jacob says of Reuben, *he was his might, and the beginning of his strength: the excellency of dignity, and the excellency of power*^g.

^b Deut. xvi. 10. ^c Μη ἀσπύχουρα. ^d Deut. xiv. 29; xvi. 15; xxiii. 20; xxiv. 19; xxvi. 15.

^e Prov. iii. 9, 10.

^f Psalm cxvii. 3.

^g Gen. xlix. 3.

The manner of God's receiving this tribute deserves likewise to be considered. The firstlings of all clean beasts were sacrificed in kind: those of unclean were redeemed by a lamb; or if the owner would not go to that price, then the beast itself was not suffered to live°. Of these likewise no vows could be made, because they were God's already; and so men had no property in, no right to dispose of them. The children were likewise to be redeemed, not with a beast, (as some have mistaken that passage in Exodus, applying the lamb to the sons, which belongs only to the ass,) but with a sum of money^p. Whereof the third and the eighteenth chapters of Numbers give this account. God, intending to make his claim of the firstborn, ordered the sum of them to be computed, as also of the tribe of Levi, at the same time. The Levites he accepted, in lieu of an equal number of the firstborn then alive in Israel; and made them his own peculiar, by appropriating them to the service of the altar. Some will have this to be a reward to that tribe, for distinguishing themselves from the rest, and not joining in the worship of the molten calf; but the employing them in divine service is generally believed to be, the putting that which was the business of the firstborn upon them. For mankind were not always so ignorant or so profane as the men of this generation, who think it degrades and lessens a man of condition to minister about holy things. No: this was esteemed a dignity, and a privilege, the prerogative of the master and father of the family, and reserved for the heir and most honourable person in the whole house. So far then as the Levites extended, so far they were an exchange for the firstborn; and the overplus were redeemed at the price of five shekels a man. Which afterwards passed into a standing rate, to be paid for the firstborn in all succeeding ages. And this was accounted God's revenue; a part of the stipend which they, who are so often in Scripture honoured with the title of the Lord's portion, had to subsist upon.

Such is the law; and the obedience paid to it in the person of our blessed Saviour is full of mystery, as the institution itself was full of figure and significance.

How far the circumstances of this son came under the law is not necessary to inquire, after what hath already been said under the former head. The same reasons in great measure hold for the presentation of the Son, which persuaded the purification of the mother. But in him thus presented we may behold the full accomplishment of that law in all its parts. The deliverance of Israel by the death of the firstborn was a most express image of the Israel of God being afterwards rescued from slavery and oppression insupportable by the death of this Firstborn and our Elder Brother. The devoting those children of the Israelites ascribed the glory of the deliverance to God, and owned it was he alone, and not any strength of their own, which made the difference between them and their enemies. And as that acknowledged the blessing, and sanctified their families, and encouraged their hopes of a future increase, so this Firstborn was offered for us all, as the fountain and foundation of all our mercies; the

° Exod. xiii. 12, 13; Levit. xvii. 26.

^p Numb. iii. 12, 16, 39; xviii. 12, &c.

Person from whom all the family of God both in heaven and earth are blessed, and derive their whole hope and happiness. As there the Levites were taken into the service of the tabernacle instead of the firstborn, so here this Firstborn was made an High Priest; the only acceptable, the only eternal one; and the discharge of that function in its several offices hath ransomed the lives of all the rest: with this difference only, that God did not so exchange him for a sum of money as not to require his person in kind; for his life was paid down for the benefit of the younger children. And to this commutation, usual in the case of the firstborn, St. Peter may possibly allude when desiring those Jews, to whom his First Epistle was addressed, to consider, *that they were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, but with the precious blood of Christ himself*⁴. Thus he became (as the apostle styles him) *the firstborn among many brethren*; who are all admitted to the honour and benefits of adoption, made children of the same Father and family, and heirs of the same heavenly kingdom with and in and through him⁵.

Thus was the intent of the law fulfilled; which, by declaring the firstborn holy, and prescribing a method for making the rest so, implied, that there should be one Firstborn originally and essentially so: the perfection of holiness in himself; the only source of it to others. The same who, by the sacrifice of his death, fulfilled another typical branch of the law, with regard to beasts; which required the clean in kind, and with the blood of such redeemed the unclean.

These are the effects, and this is the mysterious importance, of the only Son of God being presented in the temple, in substance of our flesh. The practical improvement whereof to ourselves may be manifold. The law, though its letter do no longer oblige, bath yet a moral sense of eternal binding force. For since to God was devoted the firstborn, *even the chief of all their strength*, this shews that we ought to think nothing too good for him; that the best is his due, and fittest to be offered there, from whence the whole is given. This teaches us then to consecrate the beginning and oboice of all our time and pains and substance; to dedicate the prime of our years, the sprightliness of our youth, the flower of our wit, the vigour of our bodies and minds, to his honour: to spend our sweat, our labours, our wealth, upon such things especially as promote religion, and are agreeable to his good pleasure; to begin every day, every work, with him; and to take care that he be first and uppermost in all our thoughts and designs. Quite contrary to those unworthy wretches, who throw away their time and hearts and estates, and every thing most valuable, upon sin and folly; who would put God off with the nauseous and useless dregs of life, the decays and diseases and doings of a feeble old age; and scarce ever think of him, till other delights have forsaken them, and they can no longer with satisfaction think of any thing else.

Secondly, when we thus observe the mystical intention of the law, and present ourselves to God, after our Saviour's example, we must remember that he was brought by a virgin mother; and that our

offering in like manner must be chaste and holy, and come from a pure and clean heart. A heart washed from the pollutions of the world, and desirous of no pleasure in comparison of that which results from studying to please God, and the ravishing sense of his favour and good acceptance. A heart recommended by that zeal, that sincerity, which may be well approved; and if not perfectly without spot, yet having no spots but those of children, not the false colours of hypocrisy or the blemishes of wilful sin. A heart which, according to the condescensions of the gospel-covenant, may be esteemed a *white robe of righteousness*, though sullied by the necessary frailties of the flesh we wear with it. For such as these the Father seeketh to worship him. But,

Lastly, when we do approach even thus, *it must always be remembered to whom we owe our acceptance; that by Christ alone we have access with confidence to the Father*^a; that he is the Firstborn, the most excellent of every creature: and that all our expectations lie couched in this argument, *If the firstfruits be holy, the lump is also holy*^b; and because he lives and reigns for ever, all that are truly his brethren and members shall most certainly in and by and with him live also. Which God grant we may do, &c. Amen.

ST. MATTHIAS'S DAY.

A short Account of St. Matthias.

THE Scripturo takes notice of St. Matthias in that place, and upon that occasion only, which comes into the service of the day. He is, both by Eusebius^a and St. Jerome^b, affirmed to have been one of the seventy disciples. The province assigned him is said by the latter to have been one of the Ethiopias. The rivers, mentioned in that account, inclined Dr. Cave to think it should be Cappadocia. He was there murdered by the pagans. In what manner it is uncertain; but an hymn cited by Dr. C. out of the Greek offices seems, as from a received opinion, to speak him crucified. The Gospel or Acts of Matthias was a spurious book, said by Eusebius^c to have been composed by heretics, and fathered upon him. And Clemens Alexandrinus observes^d, that Valentinus, Marcion, and Basilides, sheltered their vile tenets under the pretended authority of this apostle.

THE COLLECT.

O ALMIGHTY God, who into the place of the traitor Judas didst choose thy faithful servant Matthias^e to be of the number of the twelve Apostles; Grant that thy Church, being

^a Ephes. ii. 18.

^b Rom. xi. 16.

^c Hist. ii. 12.

^d Hieron. in Catal.

^e Hist. ii. 25.

^f Hieron. 7. p. 765.

^g Acts i. 24, 25, 26.

always preserved from false apostles, may be ordered and guided by faithful and true pastors; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

THE EPISTLE. Acts i. 15.

15 *In those days Peter stood up in the midst of the disciples, and said, (the number of the names together were about an hundred and twenty,)*

day of Pentecost, Peter proposed to them the choice of a twelfth apostle in the room of Judas.

16 *Men and brethren, this scripture must needs have been fulfilled, which the Holy Ghost by the mouth of David spake before concerning Judas, which was guide to them that took Jesus.*

17 *For he was numbered with us, and had obtained part of this ministry.*

18 *Now this man purchased a field with the reward of iniquity; and falling headlong, he burst asunder in the midst, and all his bowels gushed out.*

19 *And it was known unto all the dwellers at Jerusalem; insomuch as that field is called in their proper tongue, *Aceldama*, that is to say, *The field of blood*.*

20 *For it is written in the book of Psalms, Let his habitation be desolate, and let no man dwell therein: and his bishoprick let another take.*

him; and that another, more worthy of it.

21 *Wherefore of those men which have companied with us all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us,*

22 *Beginning from the baptism of John, unto that same day that he was taken up from us, must one be ordained to be a witness with us of his resurrection.*

course of his public ministry; that he might be able to concur in the same testimony with the eleven in all material points of the Christian faith, and especially that of Christ's rising from the dead.

23 *And they appointed two, Joseph called Barsabas, who was surnamed Justus, and Matthias.*

24 *And they prayed, and said, Thou, Lord, which knowest the hearts of all men, shew whether of these two thou hast chosen.*

15. Soon after our Lord's ascent into heaven, and before the miraculous descent of the Holy Spirit on the

16, &c. To this end, he first puts them in mind of a famous prophecy fulfilled in that wretched man; and relates both his crime and the punishment of it.

20. Particularly that he should fall from that high dignity in the church which had been conferred upon that character, should succeed him in it.

21, 22. But this person of necessity should be one who, by a constant attendance upon Jesus, hath been perfectly acquainted with what he had done and taught during the whole

23. Hereto the assembly readily agreed, and two persons thus qualified were accordingly in nomination.

24, 25, 26. Whereupon (after devout prayer to God that he would direct them

25 *That he may take part of this ministry and apostleship, from which Judas by transgression fell, that he might go to his own place.*

26 *And they gave forth their lots; and the lot fell upon Matthias; and he was numbered with the eleven apostles.*

in their choice) they proceeded in it by the way of lot. And the lot falling on Matthias, he was taken into the vacancy, and made the twelfth apostle.

COMMENT.

THE main thing here intended is to acquaint us with the reasons and manner of this day's apostle being chosen into the place of Judas. But before we enter upon that point, let me make a remark or two on St. Peter's discourse concerning that wretched man, which contains some things too profitable to be passed over without our particular notice.

1. First, then, it is observable, that St. Peter, mentioning the fact for which Judas perished, does it in these terms, *Judas, who was guide to them that took Jesus*. We cannot reasonably imagine this apostle, or any to whom he spoke, wanting in a just indignation at the treachery of this fallen brother; and yet the most villainous of all crimes could not have been expressed in softer words. Now my design is, by this remark, to give check to that liberty men are apt, and think themselves abundantly warranted, to take, in speaking of ill actions and ill men, with the most aggravating terms of infamy and reproach. There are, I confess, (and I have heretofore shewed^f;) some occasions which even require this sort of treatment from us. But, except in such circumstances, and for promoting such good ends as were there specified, it argues more of a charitable and truly Christian spirit to abate of our fierceness, even against those practices of which we do well to conceive the utmost abhorrence. For the virulent language so often poured out upon profligate and wicked people is many times the effect, not of zeal, but ill-nature. But how barbarous and wicked a pleasure is it to upbraid, expose and insult over the faults of our brethren, which we ought to pity and be sorry for, even then when we ought to condemn and detest them!

2. To this purpose we shall do well to attend to a second particular, very considerable in St. Peter's management of this subject. Which is, referring the audience to an ancient prophecy foretelling that crime of Judas many hundred years before. Thus it appeared that in the whole matter there was a secret overruling Providence, without whose knowledge and permission none of those things are done; which in themselves carry so great a degree of guilt and horror, that one would stand amazed how even the most abandoned of men should ever be capable of committing them. Such events they who think too superficially have frequently made objections against the being and providence of God. But the apostle here hath taught us to penetrate deeper into and pronounce more justly of them. He hath shewed the reflections properly resulting from thence to be, that it is reasonable to

^f Gospel for the sixth Sunday after Trinity.

endure patiently the ill effects of that astonishing wickedness which God sees fit to permit; to contemplate his wisdom and longsuffering in them all; and not give way to impatience or irreligious suggestions upon account of any injuries or uneasinesses to ourselves, from practices which he who knew did yet not prevent or interpose against, though they were manifest affronts to his honour and outrageous violations of his laws. In short, we should satisfy ourselves that he who always orders that which is best, and can at pleasure put an effectual stop to the most daring and potent offenders, forbears to do so for no other reason than because he knows, though we shortsighted mortals cannot tell why, it is better that their impieties should not be more restrained.

3. But then those offenders should by all means observe, thirdly, that St. Peter, together with the crime, does also relate the punishment of Judas, as a thing no less foreknown and foretold. And the natural consequence of this would be, that wickedness so connived at and foreseen does involve the actors in no degree less guilt for the bringing about such events, and effecting such wise counsels of Providence as are produced from thence. For God, as a wise man expresses it, hath left men in the hand of their own counsel. And although the Divine omniscience perfectly understand all their doings and all their thoughts long before, yet are those thoughts and doings still their own. He does not determine their wills by any physical or forcible restraint, but he hath given them great variety of moral restraints; the light of reason, the guidance of revelation, the power of conscience: and by these he expects men should govern themselves. If they do not, he convinces them that though the fact be theirs, the consequences are his: and therefore he frequently exerts himself in turning to his own glory and the good of the world the malice and mischievous designs of base and villainous wretches. Thus I have formerly made appear^b he did in the very case before us. But still God punishes men, not according to events, but intentions; and considers as a judge the mischief they actually did or designed, without any regard to the benefit he turned it to, which it was not any part of their meaning to promote.

I could not well overlook passages qualified to yield so much profit, though not so immediately concerned in the solemnity of this day. I come now to the other parts of the Epistle which are so, and shall there observe three things:

1. First, the nature and dignity of the apostolic office.
2. Secondly, the reason given for filling up the number when this vacancy was made.
3. Thirdly, the manner of the choice.

1. As to the first of these, I find myself in great measure prevented by what hath been formerly delivered upon another occasionⁱ. The apostolic office and authority was then shewed to consist in three things: 1. In propagating and establishing the kingdom of the Messiah, our Lord Jesus, by bringing men to the belief and obedience

^a Eccles. xv.

^b See Gospel for Tuesday before Easter.
Sunday after Easter.

ⁱ See Gospel for the first

of his blessed gospel. 2. In a power of ordering and making such laws and constitutions in matters spiritual as shall from time to time be found necessary for the good government of all the subjects in this kingdom; for admitting into, punishing in, and casting out of it, as occasion shall require. And, 3. in appointing successors with the like powers for continuing the order and administering the sacred offices of the church. These several rights and privileges then more at large insisted on seem to have been not intimated only, but confirmed and exercised by the proceedings we are now considering as proper to this festival.

The first of them, which relates to the propagation and establishment of the gospel, I take to be very plainly included in the twenty-first and second verses. There St. Peter declares the end and proper business which this new apostle was to be ordained for, and the qualifications requisite to render him capable of it.

The end or business to which he was ordained is expressed by being a witness (together with the eleven) of our Lord's resurrection. I lately had occasion to observe^k how important an article this of Christ's resurrection is; how particular a stress the Scriptures of the New Testament lay upon it; and how frequently it is mentioned in a sense so comprehensive as to include the whole object of the Christian faith. That thus we are to understand it here is evident from the qualification premised. For had that single point of Jesus rising again been the subject-matter of the apostle's testimony, to have retained to Jesus at that time had sufficed to render these candidates capable of this office. But in regard the *having companied with the eleven all the time that Jesus went in and out among them, beginning from the baptism of John, until the same day that he was taken up from them*^l, in regard this, I say, is made a necessary condition of the choice here proposed, it follows that the actions and doctrines of our blessed Saviour during the course of his public ministry are all taken in to this evidence, and implied by that head of our Lord's resurrection. For which comprehensive sense of that expression my reader will content himself to receive the reasons laid down in the discourse last referred to.

Were not this long and intimate acquaintance with our blessed Saviour of the utmost consequence for bringing men over to the profession of Christianity, why did St. John begin his First Epistle with so solemn a preface^m—*That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, and our hands have handled, of the Word of life; (for the life was manifested, and we have seen it, and bear witness, and shew unto you that eternal life, which was with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ;) that which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us, &c.* For the same reason St. Luke, who was not himself an apostle, when writing his Gospel, which he styles a *treatise of all that Jesus began both to do and teach, until the day that he was taken up*ⁿ, obviates any objection which might be made from his want of the apostolic

^k See Comment on Epistle for St. Andrew's day. ^l Acts ii. 21, 22. ^m 1 John i. 1, 2, 3.
ⁿ Acts i. 1, 2.

rected us all to follow, by begging, in her Collect for this festival; that we and all Christians, *being always preserved from false apostles; may be ordered and guided by faithful and true pastors; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.*

THE GOSPEL. St. Matt. xi. 25.

25 *At that time Jesus answered and said, I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes.*

x. 5. Compare Luke x. 22.) to spread his doctrine had met with in persons of a disposition different from that upbraided in the verses next before, gave solemn thanks to his Father for it; and magnified the wisdom of that dispensation which left the self-conceited in the ignorance they affected, and instructed the meek and dispassionate, the modest and the lowly, in the mysteries of the gospel.

26 *Even so, Father: for so it seemed good in thy sight.*

27 *All things are delivered unto me of my Father: and no man knoweth the Son, but the Father; neither knoweth any man the Father, save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son will reveal him.*

28 *Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.*

those hardships which the Levitical law, the consciousness of their own faults and frailties, or the difficulties of human life, would otherwise continue to load them withal: and in comparison whereof, the duty and subjection he requires of them would be found very supportable.

29 *Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls.*

30 *For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.*

his commands, and the discharge of them softened by great comforts and inward satisfactions.

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wanted not knowledge to fit him for this work, is plain from the terms upon which he was appointed; and that he wanted not zeal and a good disposition, is no less manifest from the Knower of all hearts ordering him to be chosen. And therefore we must take another view of the apostolic office to find out the necessity of his being advanced to it.

Now though it be true that others might and did preach the doctrine of Christ, yet was not their authority, even in this respect, equal to that of the apostles. For the Scriptures take express notice of several distinctions in point of power between them and other ministers of the gospel. Particularly that to them Christ left the care of his church^y; to them gave the power of administering his sacraments^z; of teaching and gathering disciples; of feeding his sheep; of remitting and retaining sins^a; nay, and even of conferring the gift of the Holy Ghost by laying on of hands^b. In short, the powers which he exercised in his own person while the church enjoyed his bodily presence were delegated to them after his departure, as his deputies and vicegerents. Of these powers some were committed by them to inferior and subordinate ministers; and others reserved to their own highest order. And this was done after their Lord's example, who made a like distinction between the seventy and the twelve. For of these last he says, (and more could not be said to magnify the extent and dignity of their office,) that to *them* he appoints a kingdom, as his Father had appointed unto him, that they may eat and drink at his table in his kingdom, and sit on thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel^c.

Thus after our Lord's ascent into heaven and the descent of the Holy Spirit, all the jurisdiction and government of this spiritual society, the church, was lodged in the apostles. Whosoever had any part of it afterwards received it from this source. The instances of exercising it, in matters of expedience and discipline, occur frequently in the Epistles; and one very famous example of it we have in the book of Acts^d, upon the matter of circumcision and other Mosaical rites; whether the new-converted Gentiles were obliged to them. The determination whereof was referred to the apostles and elders at Jerusalem, and their decree received in and submitted to by all the churches^e.

The instances indeed of their authority in prescribing rules, reforming abuses, settling points of decency and order, censuring criminals, pardoning penitents, shutting out from, and restoring to communion, and the ready and constant effect these acts had, are undeniable proofs of their exercising, and of the universal sense of Christians that they had right to exercise, such power, in all things wherein the discipline and good government of this spiritual kingdom were concerned. But that which comes up yet closer to the words of St. Peter before us is their being, under Christ, not only the common source of spiritual authority in matters of discipline, but the centre of spiritual unity in matters of doctrine. Thus the new converts on

^y Matt. xxviii. 19, 20.^z Ch. xvi. 20, 26, 27.^a John xx. 23, 23.^b Acts viii. 17, 19.^c Luke xiii. 29, 30.^d Acts xv.^e Ch. xvi. 4.

the day of Pentecost have their faith, their sincerity, their good agreement and their devotion described, by *continuing steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers*¹. Thus when the false Judaizing teachers had troubled the minds of many, *subverting their souls, and saying they must needs be circumcised*², it was thought a sufficient warrant for rejecting such impostors and their frauds for the future, for the apostles to declare that *they never gave any such commandment*. Thus their decree is pronounced the act of the Holy Ghost, as well as of the assembly. Thus they are said to be a part of the foundation on which this spiritual house, the church of Christ, is built³. Thus in the passages I had occasion to produce as proofs of a standard of faith and manners then agreed on, we find abundant intimations of the people's ready receiving those, as terms of becoming Christians. And indeed they seem to have been by the apostles made the conditions of the covenant at baptism. The keys of the kingdom of heaven, intrusted in their hands, were to be used according to the direction of their Master; and though they did not originally make, yet they declared and explained the will of their Lord in matters of this nature. To render such declarations more authentic, and indeed above all exception, they were ordered to suspend the exercise of their powers till the Holy Ghost should be poured out upon them. But afterwards, when acting and speaking under the influence of this infallible guide, their authority was justly esteemed so sacred, that the only question debated among sober and well-minded Christians seems to have been, whether the doctrine or practice at any time in dispute could be traced up to the apostles. It being generally agreed that whatever they have delivered, as such ought, and that nothing which they did not deliver ought, to be required as an article of belief necessary to salvation.

Hence St. Paul thanks God that the Romans had *obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine whereto they had been delivered*⁴ (for so the original expresses it). Timothy is charged to keep, and to commit to faithful men, the good thing intrusted with him; to remember and discharge the good profession he had made before many witnesses⁵. St. Peter also speaks of the holy commandment *being acknowledged*⁶; and St. John of the *unction* being received⁷. By all which (as I said) seems to be intended the public profession of belief and obedience solemnly made at baptism: such a summary of a Christian's duty as the apostles thought proper to require at each man's admission into the church; such again, as might serve for a model and measure to frame and examine the teaching of all other ministers by; such a one, I say, being formed, established, and enjoined for these uses by the apostles, and, as such, received, revered, and obeyed by the whole church, as Christ's own act and command, in those his vicegerents; we may see very good reason why Matthias (supposing him equally qualified before, both as to knowledge and zeal) should yet be taken into the number of the apostles. And thus it comes to pass, that, besides the governing part peculiar to them-

¹ Acts ii. 42. ² Ch. xv. 24. ³ Eph. ii. 20. ⁴ Rom. vi. 17. ⁵ 1 Tim. vi. 14, 20;
⁶ 2 Tim. i. 14; ii. 2: 1 Tim. vi. 13. ⁷ 1 Pet. ii. 21. ⁸ 1 John ii. 20, 27.

selves, their authority, even in the instructing part, was such, that they were, in a degree far more eminent than any else, entitled *witnesses of our Lord's resurrection*.

Yet still another question remains, concerning the number necessary for these purposes, and why eleven might not as well suffice. Which, it is plain, they could not; for St. Peter is express, that one must be ordained in the room of Judas ^a. The reason whereof I come now in the

2. Second place to consider. The apostle seems to ground this necessity upon another, mentioned at the sixteenth verse, that of fulfilling a prophecy relating to this matter; one clause whereof says, that the office or bishopric of Judas should be *taken by another*. Now here I might insist on the manner of such applications of prophecies being so expressed as may seem to import a cause, when really an event only is intended; and that the New Testament does not mean that the thing was done for that very purpose, that such a prediction in the Old might be accomplished; but only that by the thing so done, as related in the New, such a prediction in the Old Testament was remarkably accomplished.

But I have formerly observed^o, that this necessity of fulfilling things foretold depended upon another antecedent to it. The truth of God must be justified by events correspondent to his predictions; but that truth had never engaged itself by such predictions, unless God had first resolved upon those events. If therefore we can discover any reason which might determine our Lord to choose the precise number of twelve apostles, and oblige the continuance of that number at this time; that may be allowed to have given occasion, as well to the prophecy repeated by St. Peter, as to the supply of this vacancy which accomplished it.

The correspondence between the church before and after our Saviour, or, as the Scripture phrases it, between *Israel after the flesh*^p and the spiritual *Israel of God*^q, hath been in several particulars illustrated heretofore. This, where it was consistent with the nature of each dispensation, did not only shew respect to the legal establishment, (which, though less perfect, was yet of divine extract,) but would naturally recommend it to the esteem of the Jews; and was therefore fit to be continued, so long as they continued a settled polity and people. As therefore Moses and Joshua, each the type of Christ, had next under them twelve who were called the princes of the tribes, representing those patriarchs from whom those tribes had their descent and denomination^r; and as these were particularly distinguished from the rest by special acts of authority and divine designation; so had this deliverer from spiritual bondage, this leader of his people into the land of promise, his twelve apostles, the patriarchs and princes of this new people of God, to gather, to govern them, and to act in their behalf, as appointed by their common head. And hence it comes to pass that the agreement in the Jewish and Christian polity is so often insinuated, to the honour of these apostles, by

^a Acts i. 22. ^o Gospel for Quinquagesima Sunday. ^p 1 Cor. x. 18. ^q Gal. vi. 16.
^r Numb. i. 44; vii. 3; xiv. Joshua iii. 4.

mention of *twelve thrones, on which they shall sit judging the twelve tribes of Israel*¹: of the church represented by a woman crowned with *twelve stars*²: and of the heavenly Jerusalem, described with a wall great and high, with twelve gates, and at the gates twelve angels, and names written thereon, which are the names of the twelve tribes of the children of Israel. And the wall of the city had twelve foundations, and in them the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb³. These and some other like allusions there are, which manifestly prove a resemblance designed to be (for some time at least) kept up between the natural and the spiritual Israel, with regard to the chief officers in both. But this resemblance regards the number, no less than the quality of those chiefs; and consequently rendered a supply necessary to the apostolic order, when Judas had diminished this set number by his fall.

3. And as the similitude holds in the number of these chiefs of the spiritual Israel, so does it likewise in the manner of their appointment⁴. The heads of the tribes of Israel after the flesh were first named by God himself; the princes of the Israel, after the Spirit, were chosen by Christ. And the person here chosen was of divine designation. For the manner of the proceeding is such as manifestly refers the issue to God's determination. The nominations of this kind were afterwards made by the apostles themselves; because then their act was properly God's act, and the choice of fit persons to serve in so high a station was a matter of so great importance to the church, that no doubt can be made but his very particular assistance was present with them in it. But at this time the Holy Ghost was not yet given; and in a case which was therefore singular, they had recourse to a method which had often been practised, and was always believed to denote the special appointment of God.

The deciding of things contingent by lots was a practice instituted by God's own command. Thus the two goats, on the solemn day of atonement, were separated; the one for slaughter to be sacrificed, the other for escape into the wilderness⁵. Thus the land of Canaan was divided, and a portion of it assigned to each tribe⁶. Thus the cities of the Levites were set apart out of the inheritance assigned to the other tribes⁷. Thus it was determined who should revenge the wickedness of Benjamin by attacking Gibeah⁸. Thus the services of the priests in the sanctuary were divided⁹. All which were so constantly believed to be of God's immediate assignation, as to give occasion for that aphorism of Solomon, *The lot is cast into the lap; but the whole disposing thereof is of the Lord*¹⁰.

From hence, as a matter universally acknowledged among persons conversant in the religion and customs of the Jews, it appears, that the putting the choice of an apostle upon this issue was a very solemn way of referring it to the decision of God himself. Which is yet farther evidenced by that solemn invocation of him upon this so important exigence. Whereby these great patterns of piety have set us an example, which the wisdom of our excellent Church hath di-

¹ Matt. xix. 29; Luke xxii. 30. ² Rev. xii. 1. ³ Rev. xxi. 12, 14. ⁴ Numb. i. 5.
⁵ Levit. xvi. 7, 8. ⁶ Numb. xxv. 55; Josh. xiii. 2, 6. ⁷ Josh. xxi. 8. ⁸ Judges ix. 9.
⁹ 1 Chron. xxiv. 5, &c.; Luke i. 5. ¹⁰ Prov. xvi. 33.

rected us all to follow, by begging, in her Collect for this festival; that we and all Christians, *being always preserved from false apostles; may be ordered and guided by faithful and true pastors; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.*

THE GOSPEL. St. Matt. xi. 25.

25 *At that time Jesus answered and said, I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes.*

x. 5. Compare Luke x. 22.) to spread his doctrine had met with in persons of a disposition different from that upbraided in the verses next before, gave solemn thanks to his Father for it; and magnified the wisdom of that dispensation which left the self-conceited in the ignorance they affected, and instructed the meek and dispassionate, the modest and the lowly, in the mysteries of the gospel.

26 *Even so, Father: for so it seemed good in thy sight.*

27 *All things are delivered unto me of my Father: and no man knoweth the Son, but the Father; neither knoweth any man the Father, save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son will reveal him.*

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which either they to whom these words were spoken did, or any other persons whatsoever can possibly, labour under.

To this purpose I shall set myself to satisfy the two following inquiries:

1. First, what those burdens of misery are which expose men to all that hardship and disquiet thought fit to be intimated here by wearisomeness and labour and pain. And then,

2. Secondly, what comforts and cures the sincere obedience of Christ and his gospel administers to each of these respectively.

1. As to the causes of this misery, they may, I think, be conveniently enough reduced to three sorts; such as arise either,

First, from the temper of the Jewish law, and the state of men's souls under that dispensation; or,

Secondly, from a consciousness of their own sins; or,

Lastly, from the afflictions of the present life.

1. The first of these, which regards the Jewish law, though exceeding pertinent to our Lord's purpose, and the circumstances of the persons with whom he was then conferring, is yet to us (blessed be God) of no farther concern, than as the weight of the burden, when rightly understood, may make us duly thankful for the greatness of the deliverance. Referring therefore to my second head so much as may be servicable to that end, I proceed to the next burden, which I presume our Saviour might have in view. And that is,

2. The consciousness of our own sins. It were easy to enlarge on this occasion, by representing the justness of giving to a vicious course of life the titles of weariness and labour; how exactly they square to the insupportable tyranny of ungoverned appetites and passions, and to the endless drudgery of attempting to gratify them. But this I rather take to be insinuated at the thirtieth verse, where the *yoke* of Christ is affirmed to be *easy*, and his *burden light*. And therefore, since neither the measure of this discourse permits, nor the text obliges me to go so far, I choose to confine my thoughts to that sense of guilt in particular which we often find David and other holy penitents in Scripture complaining of, as a load very sore, and *too heavy for them to bear* ^c.

At the instant of commission we are warmed with passion and eager desire. The prospect of some pleasure or profit carries us out of ourselves; and, like soldiers in battle, we are not sensible of the wound just at the moment of its being given. But when the heat of action is over, then, like them too, we grow stiff and full of anguish. The flush of our spirits cools, and the gayety of our false expectations forsakes us. We begin to see the fact as it really is, stripped of all those counterfeit beauties in which sensuality and the subtlety of the tempter had dressed it up to deceive us. And upon a second and sober recollection, nothing remains behind but deformed images of our folly, and the smarting scourges of a self-condemning breast.

And who is able to live under the gnawings of this worm? Were there no other torture in wickedness but that of being eternally dissatisfied with one's own self, and the clamorous reproaches that sound

from within, no man of reason and ingenuity could long support it : none could think any advantages of sin worth his purchase at so dear, and withal so unbecoming, so unmanly a price.

But when the matter does not end here ; when *our hearts* therefore condemn us, because we have offended One who is *greater than our hearts*, and *knoweth all things*^f ; One who sees a great deal which we never observed, and punctually remembers many things which we have long since forgotten, and considers distinctly each aggravation of those crimes which our own partiality hath by all possible artifice laboured to soften and extenuate ; when the sentence we now pass upon our guilty selves is but a pledge and anticipation of that future and final one which shall be pronounced in thunder by our angry Judge, and the present horrors of a wounded conscience are so many foretastes of the fruitless and endless agonies of the damned ; when, I say, the case stands thus with sins unpardoned, no wonder if such remembrances be grievous, and the burden of them intolerable. And yet this, and no better, is the condition to which a habit of vice indulged reduces men. So bitter is the reflection, so dismal is the prospect, of an accusing mind, till thorough repentance have made up the breach, and God speak peace and reconciliation to it.

It must be confessed, and it is but too sad a truth, that this is not the case of every wicked man. Many, even of the most profligate, are utter strangers to these terrors, and commit the vilest things without any remorse at all. St. Paul instructs us how to account for their doing so, when he says, *their consciences are seared with a hot iron*^g, and that they have so hardened themselves by custom *as to be past feeling*^h. If therefore some work all *uncleanness with greediness*, if they glory and triumph in their shame, does this proceed from the safety ? No, but from the stupidity of their souls. Yet these are the wretches that insult religion and its ministers ; that often rejoice in and boast of such insensibility, as a mark of their happiness and native freedom. Vain absurd men ! Why do ye not (for ye might with equal reason) extol the peculiar happiness of an apoplexy, and the profound tranquillities of a lethargy ? In all these cases ease is equally the symptom of misery and danger ; for, till the patient be awakened into tenderness and smart, there is no hope, no possibility of a cure. A wounded spirit is certainly very grievous and hard to bear ; but even the painfullest of those wounds will bring more true comfort at last, and are infinitely rather to be chosen, than that sottish hardness which says of guilt in general, as Solomon's drunkard said of his wine, *They have stricken me, and I was not sick ; they have beaten me, and I felt it not : when shall I awake ? I will seek it yet again*ⁱ.

3. The third burden which I presume to be intimated here was said to be that suffering and disquiet of heart which may arise from the afflictions of the present world. The greatest and most prosperous of the sons of men are in no degree exempted from the power of Providence, but feel in their fortunes surprising changes and frequent interruptions. Diseases and pains in their own persons, hazards and losses in their estates, disappointments in their most pro-

^f 1 John iii. 20.^g 1 Tim. iv. 2.^h Ephes. iv. 19.ⁱ Prov. xxiii. 35.

missing hopes and undertakings, parting with the most useful of their friends and the dearest of their relations; and a thousand, and ten thousand, melancholy events, which no prudence can prevent, no sagacity can foresee, and consequently no wit of man can particularly describe: some or other of these do more or less chequer the life of every one of us. These there is no remedy but bear we must: and well it were if all of us could bring ourselves to bear them as we ought. The great misfortune is, that when these fall in with a black heavy blood, weak minds, or very tender natures, the impression is too strong. Life itself grows a burden, and all its comforts are soured and swallowed up by some too overbearing resentment of grief. And indeed even they who are most happy, both in their circumstances and their constitutions, do find the mixture of sweets in their cup, or (which, in regard of the point before us, comes much to one) the manner at least of their tasting and being affected with these, greatly overpowered by that of their bitter part.

If then we view mankind in this melancholy position; exposed to infinite sufferings and temptations; pushed on to sensual pleasures by strong appetites, not to be gratified with safety; violently averse to many difficulties which reason and honour forbid them to decline; liable to daily and hourly alterations, and much more sensibly moved with every change from better to worse; destitute, afflicted, tormented; and all without the notices of any other state, or the support of a compensation to be made hereafter; where shall we find a creature more truly pitiable?

I am not now considering what reliefs might be had from those privileges by which human nature is so gloriously distinguished; supposing every man to make the best that can possibly be made of reason and consideration. But I take men as we find them, and as they commonly order the matter. And thus I may be bold to ask, what those privileges are generally, in fact and in the event, but so many fresh instruments of new, unnecessary, and more grievous troubles? Brutes are indeed a great deal beneath us in dignity and capacity; but are they not manifestly beneath us in several aggravations of suffering also? They feel the present, and they feel that only. Their evils are all of nature's and God's sending: they do not fear what they cannot foresee; and when their pains have done, they have done with them. And how supportable is this, in comparison of that which the generality of mankind endure, whose most and sorest troubles are not the work of Providence, but their own! They chew the cud of every unpalatable morsel, renew their calamities by sad reflections upon them when past and gone, but forget the numberless blessings that should balance these; are ever looking forward, scaring themselves with distant possibilities, and lose all sense of present good by ghastly images of evils that never come to pass at all. Thus are reason and memory turned upon ourselves, and made our constant executioners: as if the prerogative of mankind consisted only in a greater dexterity to rack and torment themselves than any other creature here below is made capable of.

What redress then shall wretched mortals find, so qualified by

nature, so industrious by the abuse of their faculties, to contrive their own misery and perpetual disquiet? Will the sense of a God and Providence, and those improvements of reason commonly called natural religion, administer comfort and relief? No; not in any degree. These only add weight to the burden, by representing our crosses and calamities as the disposals of a Power above us. For whatsoever might be said of his wisdom, good men in affliction could have slender confidence in his justice or benignity. A blind chance were to such more eligible than a Governor that sees and knows, but does not distinguish in his distributions. Bad men indeed could not accuse him of iniquity: but would that make their punishment one whit the more tolerable? Surely it is not nor ever can be a mitigation of our sufferings to know we have deserved to suffer. Quite contrary; it is the last and highest aggravation, by adding the sense of guilt to that of pain, and pointing all our adversities with the goads and stings of a restless upbraiding conscience.

So would the case stand with natural religion: and the Jewish could not mend the matter. For in a law expressly covenanting (as that did) for temporal mercies and judgments, the state of each man's fortunes would be expected to hold proportion with his deserts. Consequently, the more firm persuasion of the truth of God any man entertained, the more uncomfortable must every severe dispensation be to that man; because carrying the signature of a wise and righteous God, angry and avenging some proportionable provocation. And how dark, how dismal these apprehensions are, how full of horror and amazement, all who have felt them know: and we, who are God's ministers, too frequently can see it in them whose disordered spirits and religious melancholy confound even piety and virtue itself with the bare horrowed form of guilt, and imaginary terrors of despair.

Such was the condition of mankind before Christ; such is it still without Christ. Which, methinks, should prevail with all men most passionately to desire a remedy for so complicated a misery. And where this may be found I now proceed to shew, by observing, under my

2. Second head, what cures and comforts the sincere obedience of Christ and his gospel administers to each of the griefs and burdens already specified under the first head.

1. And here it is fit I begin with the Jewish law; the burden whereof is happily removed, and our thankful acknowledgments for its being so are due upon these following accounts:

1. As its laborious ceremonies are abolished, and in their stead an easy and rational service required at our hands. A worship in spirit and truth; the practice of noble and beneficial virtues, worthy the majesty of God to accept, worthy the dignity of man to pay; and such as sufficiently recommend themselves to the sober sense and judgment of every considering person.

2. A second instance of our happiness in this respect is the provision made against the inefficacy of the legal sacrifices, by the one, the universal, the perfect and sufficient oblation of the Lamb of God: the Lamb who alone could take away sin; the Lamb who, once offered,

takes away the sins of the whole world; the Lamb, of which those under the law were types and shadows, and derived all their worth and title to acceptance from prefiguring him.

3. The rigour of that law is also remitted by changing the obedience of works into that of faith; by making gracious allowances and large abatements for unavoidable accidents and infirmities; and by receiving men upon terms consistent with frail and corrupt nature. By proposing to all sinners truly penitent, and to all good men sincere in their endeavours, that they shall be justified by the merits of another, who could not have any of their own to expect that blessing from.

Upon the whole matter then, the gospel, though a yoke, is a gentle and easy yoke, in comparison of that shaken off and exchanged for it. The covenant now struck with mankind accommodates itself to our capacities; it is possible to every honest and willing mind; it treats us with more respect; no longer as servants, but as children, nay, as heirs: it is also established upon more glorious promises: not the inheritance of an earthly Canaan, or abundance of corn and wine; but of joys exalted and refined: figured to us indeed by *eating and drinking with our heavenly Father in his kingdom*; but in reality suitable to the utmost desires of a rational and immortal soul; even the ravishing delights of his presence, with whom there are pleasures unconceivable, inexhaustible *rivers of pleasure for evermore*^k.

2. The next advantage to be considered is that which the Christian religion brings to them who are grieved and wearied with the burden of their own sins. Now the fundamental point of this religion is a Saviour and Redeemer. One who is the beloved, the only-begotten Son of God, and therefore he must needs be able; One who came into the world for that very purpose, *that all who believe in him should not perish, but have everlasting life*^l; and therefore he cannot but be willing doubtless—to *save to the uttermost them that come to God by him*^m. One who hath *washed us in his own blood*ⁿ, *nailed the handwriting that was against us to his cross, and triumphed over sin in his death*^o. One who we are perfectly assured hath effected all this, in that God raised him from the dead. For nothing less than the full payment of our debt could have rendered the detaining him in the grave impossible. And therefore the justice of God, when opening the prison and releasing our Surety, did by that very act acknowledge satisfaction. To be baptized, to believe, to repent, to engage, and to live as becomes Christians, this is still, and this is all, left upon us to do. And though all our actions will continue imperfect, and too many of them may happen to be very impure, yet still there is mercy to pardon, still there is grace to assist. And to them who are careful not to abuse these are those peaceful voices sounding from above, *My strength is made perfect in weakness*^p; and, *Son, be of good cheer, thy sins be forgiven thee*^q.

The terrors of Satan may possibly disturb, and the mistakes of a timorous mind, wrought up by an unhappy complexion, may sometimes

^k Psalm xvi. 11.

^l John iii. 16.

^m Heb. vii. 25.

ⁿ Rev. i. 5.

^o Coloss. ii. 14.

^p 2 Cor. xii. 9.

^q Matt. ix. 2.

deject even such good men as these. But so long as they give diligence heartily to bewail all involuntary, and to avoid all presumptuous wickedness, they may accost their tumultuous spirits in David's soliloquy, *Why art thou so sad, O my soul? and why art thou so disquieted within me? Still put thy trust in God*¹. For, as one better instructed than David argues, *Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth. Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us*². He hears our every sigh and groan, is conscious to every pensive thought, puts those *tears into his bottle*³ with which the pious mourners *wash their beds*⁴; interposes his own blood and sufferings, screens the trembling penitent from the justice of an angry God, and brings him before a reconciled and tender Father. A Father whose bowels yearn over the miseries which his ungracious children bring upon themselves: and a Father always ready to receive with open arms the most prodigal and lost of all his sons, when they abandon their extravagance, and come back to him and their duty. This is our Rock, the refuge and confidence of frail and guilty people; that, if we be sinners, we are such as Christ came into the world to save⁵: that no offences can be so enormous which his propitiation is not more than equivalent for; no sickness so desperate but this spiritual Physician is able to heal it. And they are the diseased, they are the polluted that he comes to. They are the *weary*, they are the *heavy laden* whom he calls. And he would not bid them come, if he were not willing to receive them. He that invites in general terms does not exclude the worst; and the worst, provided they be *weary*, sensible of their burden, and desirous to be eased of it, shall not be thought unworthy of refreshment and support and deliverance.

3. Lastly, those disquiets which arise from worldly afflictions are likewise most effectually assuaged and healed by the doctrine and service of Christ. For it is the peculiar glory of the gospel to have brought *life and immortality to light*⁶; and by establishing the certainty of one to come, to have given us a right understanding of the state we are now in. Hence we learn to distinguish between a transient condition of discipline and trial, and one of duration and final retribution. Hence, that the season of rewards and punishments, strictly so called, is not yet, nor the fate of men fixed and absolutely determined here below. Consequently, that no certain judgment can be made of ourselves or of others from the different fortunes now dispensed to them: nor any peremptory sentence passed whom God loves or whom he hates, by any thing or by all the things that are at present before us. The same adversity may be to one the blow of an enemy, and to another the chastisement of a Father; to one meant for a scourge of his vices, to another an exercise of his virtues; to both very serviceable, in order to present improvement and to future happiness. And therefore it is easy to discern how it may consist very well, not only with the justice, but even with the mercy of God to afflict the best of men:

¹ Psalm xlii. 5.² Rom. viii. 33, 34.³ Psalm lvi. 8.⁴ Psalm vi. 6.⁵ 1 Tim. i. 15.⁶ 2 Tim. i. 10.

in regard no life is so unblamable as not to deserve some correction ; nor any example of piety yet so bright as not to be capable of still greater lustre.

Now when these reflections have been duly made (which to be sure they have not till we are seriously convinced that all events are disposed by One who is wiser than we, One who sees and weighs our circumstances thoroughly. One who loves us infinitely, and seeks all occasions to do us good), we then have a comfort solid and adequate to the severest of his appointments concerning us. And this is a comfort peculiar to Christianity : because no other institution ever did or could set the demerits of sinners, the love of God to mankind, and our hopes of bliss immortal, in their true light. The utmost that philosophy can pretend to upon this occasion is in the very worst sense of the poet's terms *verba et eces*. Words only and empty sounds in comparison. For ten thousand such volumes as Seneca and Epictetus can never lie so close at our hearts, or give that sweet repose to spirits in perplexity, as this single text from St. Paul rightly applied would do—*Our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory*.*

I ought not to leave this head without adding, that, to prevent all disappointment or mistake in our expectations from the promise in my text, we must proceed with some distinction concerning the burdens severally spoken to. That of the Jewish law is indeed quite taken off ; but from the other two we are not totally delivered. We must therefore think our Lord as good as his word, if at present we be strengthened *against* sin, and supported *under* affliction. The Son of God himself, who is our pattern, had his temptations and his agonies. And his example will direct us how to interpret his promise when either of these cases happens to be ours. He had the ministry of angels in both ; we in proportion have leave to depend upon a mighty though invisible assistance ; the protection of God's providence, the presence of his grace to sustain and defend, to strengthen and rescue us. A peaceful conscience ; a mind contented, even, and serene ; a lively faith, steadfast trust, and cheerful hope : in these is the repose of a good man, while mortality detains him here below. But the time is drawing on when such as come to Christ shall actually cease from sin, and be at perfect rest from the labours and troubles of life. For the seeds of immortality are already sown, and have taken root, though they cannot bring fruit to maturity except we die. And nothing can go higher than this : no calamity can in the reason of the thing be a match for that comfort, which is qualified to reconcile us even to death, and can disarm that last grim adversary of all his sting and terror. And this is done to every good Christian, by rendering his grave a passage to light and bliss, and the separation of soul and body an expedient necessary to consummate the happiness of both.

THE ANNUNCIATION OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN MARY.

THE COLLECT.

WE beseech thee, O Lord, pour thy grace into our hearts; that, as we have known the incarnation of thy Son Jesus Christ by the message of an angel, so by his cross and passion we may be brought unto the glory of his resurrection; through the same Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen*.

THE EPISTLE. Isaiah vii. 10.

10 Moreover the Lord spake again unto Ahaz, saying,

11 Ask thee a sign of the Lord thy God; ask it either in the depth, or in the height above.

12 But Ahaz said, I will not ask, neither will I tempt the Lord.

ment of. Not because he believed without it; but because he had no confidence in or value for it.

13 And he said, Hear ye now, O house of David; Is it a small thing for you to weary men, but will ye weary my God also?

descendants of David in general. First, rebuking their infidelity under the present fear and consternation; as an injury and affront, not only to him who was God's minister, but to God himself.

14 Therefore the Lord himself shall give you a sign; Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel.

God with his people should be so conspicuous as to deserve the title of Immanuel, or God with us, in a most eminent and altogether peculiar sense and manner.

15 Butter and honey shall he eat, that he may know to refuse the evil, and choose the good.

give evidence of this by being nourished, and growing up to maturity of understanding, like common children.

10, 11. God, knowing that Ahaz would not rely upon the promise made, ver. 7, &c. gave him by Isaiah choice of any miracle he would

name, which should be wrought in confirmation of it.

12. This indulgence Ahaz refused to make the experi-

13. Hereupon the prophet concerns himself no farther with Ahaz, but addresses to the people of Judah and de-

scendants of David in general. First, rebuking their infidelity under the present fear and consternation; as an injury and affront, not only to him who was God's minister, but to God himself.

14. And then foretelling the Messiah's miraculous birth of a virgin; in whom the favour and presence of

God with his people should be so conspicuous as to deserve the title of Immanuel, or God with us, in a most eminent and altogether peculiar sense and manner.

15. And yet this Divine person should condescend to be very man; and should

give evidence of this by being nourished, and growing up to maturity of understanding, like common children. (See Luke ii. 40, 51, 52.)

COMMENT.

THE proper scriptures now offered to our meditation exactly answer the design of this festival. The mercy it commemorates being in the Epistle with great solemnity foretold, and in the Gospel for the day

* Luke i. 26, &c.; Matt. i. 20, &c.; Rom. iv. 25; vi. 5.

related with very particular circumstances as punctually accomplished. The consequence of the thing itself, and therefore of our belief of it, must needs be very great: by reason it lets us into a knowledge of the first act whereby the Son of God vouchsafed to empty himself for our sakes. In that act it reveals a mystery of *God made man*; upon which the whole scheme of the Christian religion seems principally to turn. Hence all avowed adversaries of the faith have with open malice attacked, and all the corrupters of it have with subtlety and dissembled friendship endeavoured to subvert, the article of our blessed Saviour's miraculous incarnation.

My design at present is to establish this truth; not by industriously entering into an examination of the arguments brought against it, but by such an illustration of the prophecy in the Old compared with its application in the New Testament, as may suffice to settle our own minds, and, if well attended to, will also be a good guard against the false reasonings of others.

To this purpose it will be requisite for me to consider,

- I. First, the occasion of this prophecy; and,
- II. Secondly, the substance of the prophecy itself.

1. Rightly to understand the occasion of this prophecy, we must take a short view of the time and juncture of affairs in which it was delivered. Now the history informs us, that about the end of Jotham's reign, the kings of Syria and Israel entered into designs against the people of Judah^b. Which yet God did not suffer to be put in execution, till Ahaz, whose wickedness rendered him a notorious object of divine vengeance, succeeded into the throne. Then each of these enemies were suffered to prevail. Great multitudes were carried captive to Damascus by Rezin; and in an engagement with Pekah king of Israel, the king of Judah's son, some of the principal officers, and a hundred thousand men, were slain in one day, and two hundred thousand women carried captive^c. After this, (for so it is very probably judged, by comparing together the account given in the Books of Kings and Chronicles, and placing the actions according to the order in the margin,) the kings of Israel and Syria agreed to come upon Judah with a confederate army^d. The apprehension of those powers in conjunction, which had, when encountered singly, been found too strong for them, created that general consternation in the king and people of Judah which the prophet at the second of this chapter elegantly resembles by *the trees of the wood bending and trembling with the wind*^e. Against these terrors it was that God sent Isaiah to support them: which he does, first, by a promise that the designs of the enemy should be disappointed^f; and that they, who, when made executioners of divine vengeance, could each of them separately overcome^g, now, when presuming to act without such commission, should not, with all their force united, be able to prevail. Then he foretells the downfall of their adversaries; and sets a period

^b 2 Kings xv. 37. ^c 2 Chron. xxviii. 5—8. ^d 2 Kings xv. 37; 2 Chron. xxviii. 1—16; 2 Kings xvi. 5—10. ^e Isaiah vii. 1; 2 Chron. xxviii. 16, 20, &c.; 2 Kings xvi. 10—19; 2 Chron. xxviii. 22. ^f Ver. 7, 1. ^g 2 Kings xvi. 5.

within which destruction should happen to both the kings then besieging Jerusalem^b.

These events (which came accordingly to pass in very few years after^c) the wicked king gave no credit to the prophet for. And that incredulity occasioned the proffer made at the eleventh verse. But Ahaz, who had forsaken God, and put all his confidence in the king of Assyria's help, refuses any miracle for the establishment of a faith which he had abandoned. And therefore the prophet proceeds to make a promise (not now, to him in particular, but to the family and people of David in general) of the miraculous birth of the Messiah. Which, though it were not to be accomplished in, as yet, seven hundred years, did however very well become the present occasion, and minister proper comfort in those melancholy circumstances, upon the following considerations:

1. As the Messiah was the greatest and most wonderful, the sum and complement indeed of all the mercies designed by God, and expected by his people, He, in whom all the promises are (as the apostle speaks) *yea and Amen*^k; this seems a good reason why, after the mention of any dreadful danger or calamity, the prophets do so often break out into predictions and glorious characters of Him: that so the faith and prospect of such a happiness in reserve might be a support under all, whether private or public, adversities, with which God might see fit in the meanwhile to chastise their faults and to exercise their patience.

2. But the mention of these promises was not only a reasonable comfort under sufferings; it was also a powerful argument of hope for succour and deliverance. This must needs be the natural effect of such predictions as gave the utmost assurance of the power and the goodness of God. How then could any danger or distress reasonably drive men to despair, whose minds were thoroughly possessed with a belief and expectation of this Redeemer, in whom so many miracles should meet, as must appear equal at least to any difficulties possible for his servants to be oppressed with, and in whom blessings so numerous and unspeakable should be poured out, that the love of God can no more admit of any doubt than his power? Consequently, when the face of affairs looked blackest, and no glimpse of comfort appeared from human and ordinary assistances, no more effectual expedient could be thought of to buoy up their spirits, and confirm their trust in God, than the opening a view of that deliverance intended by the Messiah. A deliverance, so much superior to any other, that the Author of it could not be supposed to want either ability or inclination to do less in any present exigence, who had irrevocably determined and firmly engaged, in his own due time, to do infinitely more for his people.

3. But especially this promise was adapted to the present conjuncture, and had a direct tendency to compose the consternation and terrors at that time upon the minds of the people. The danger that

^b Ver. 8, 16. ^c Rezin was slain about two, Pekah about three, and the kingdom of Israel broken, according to Grotius, eleven, to Usher twenty, years after. ^k 2 Cor. i. 20.

now threatened was on many accounts so formidable; the enemy without so flushed with conquest, and the besieged within so dispirited with former disasters; that nothing less was apprehended than the utter extermination of the race of Judah, and final overthrow of their constitution. Now a prediction of the Messiah's birth met directly with all such melancholy misgivings; and was an argument against them, stronger and more unanswerable, in proportion as the time of that birth was at greater distance from the time of this prediction. The reason of this assertion will soon appear to any who recollect that the Messiah, who had formerly been spoken of in terms more general¹, was afterwards described as a descendant of Judah: that the time of his coming was positively fixed while that tribe should continue distinct, and a form of government yet kept up in it: that he was also to be of the lineage of David, whose family are here particularly addressed to^m: that these prerogatives that tribe and family were well apprised of, and placed their peculiar glory and happiness in them: that Israel was not under the same expectation or claim; and therefore a determinate and short period is here expressly set for the dissolution of their state: that a nobler difference could not have been put between Israel and Judah, than, after the final and speedy ruin denounced against the one, so solemnly to assure the other of a mercy so remote: and the consequence of all must come to this at last, that every attempt could not but be vain for extinguishing that people, and rooting out that family, in this day of distress; to whom such privileges were peculiarly annexed and irreversibly decreed, that God could not be consistent with his word and most solemn engagements, if he did not rescue them out of this and all other calamities, and preserve them unbroken for at least seven hundred years longer. For so much intervened between Isaiah's prophecy in the Epistle, and the accomplishment of it in the Gospel, of the festival which we are now upon that account celebrating.

I have done with my first head, the occasion, and come now to consider, in the

II. Second place, the substance, of this prophecy. Where we shall do well to observe,

1. The thing promised, *The Lord himself shall give you a sign, Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son.*

2. The distinction whereby he should be known, in those words, *and shall call his name Emmanuel.*

Lastly, the importance of that last clause, *Butter and honey shall he eat, that he may, or, until he, know to refuse the evil and choose the good.*

The two former of these particulars St. Matthew hath taught all Christians how to applyⁿ. For, after an account of the birth of Jesus; his mother's espousals to Joseph; the discovery of her being with child before they came together; the disquiet of her husband's mind upon that occasion; the composure of those troubles by the appearance of an angel, vindicating the Virgin's innocence, and declaring that which was conceived in her to be of the Holy Ghost; he

¹ Gen. xlix. 10.

^m Psal. lxxix. cxvii.

ⁿ Ch. i. 18—21.

adds, as a farther confirmation of these surprising circumstances, *Now all this was done, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet, saying, Behold, a virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel, which being interpreted is, God with us.* I shall briefly treat of the particulars above specified in such manner as may shew that they do not only justify, but do so oblige to this, as to forbid and be incompatible with any other application.

With regard then to the first particular, the sign promised, these two remarks are obvious :

1. That the thing spoken of in the words must have come to pass after the time of speaking them. For though the verbs used in the original be of the present time, yet is this only a figure frequent in prophetic writings, to denote the undoubted certainty of the matter: and a style proper for Him to intimate his power and truth by, *who (as the apostle takes notice) calleth those things which be not as though they were.* To this style of the prophets, the reason of the thing, and, consequent to both, the universal consent of expositors of all ages and persuasions, exactly agree. The only matter in dispute hath been, at what distance the accomplishment might be allowed to follow. Whether it be not necessary to the nature and end of a sign, to be succeeded by that event, in the belief whereof it was intended to confirm men; and whether we Christians, in applying this prediction to our blessed Lord's incarnation, (an event seven hundred years off,) do not enervate the prophet's argument, and utterly evacuate the use of that which was given as the sign of events, part whereof happened in one or two, and the whole within few years after.

This must be confessed an objection that carries some appearance of strength. But the difficulty vanishes when it is remembered, 1. that the word *sign* is, in both Testaments, made use of concerning not such events only as signify some others to come after them, but all that are extraordinary and miraculous, without the least relation to or dependence upon any besides. Again, 2. even in case of such relation and mutual dependence, it is in this sense sufficient to make one thing the sign of another, that the one do so necessarily imply the certainty of the other, that if the sign do, the thing signified cannot but come to pass. And for this it is of no importance whether of the two be antecedent, or whether of them subsequent; the strength of the motive to belief lying, not in the order of time at all, but wholly in the necessary connexion of the events themselves, and the grounds they minister for reasoning and confirming our faith, according to the consequences evidently to be drawn from the one to the other.

And as the reason of the thing, so is the authority of the Scripture with us in this point. I will just mention an example or two, that you may see the passage before us is not singular. God, speaking to Moses out of the flaming bush in Horeb, promises his people a deliverance from their bondage, and commands him to be the instrument of it by carrying a message to Pharaoh. Moses declines the office,

as too great for him to undertake, and desires some evidence of its succeeding in his hands¹. To remove this diffidence, he is answered by God in the following words; *Certainly I will be with thee; and this shall be a token unto thee, that I have sent thee: When thou hast brought forth the people out of Egypt, ye shall serve God upon this mountain.* Again: when, shortly after the calamity now before us, Hezekiah was insulted by the messengers of Sennacherib, and in no condition to defend himself, God promises not to suffer so much as a siege to be laid against Jerusalem. Which was performed effectually the very night following, by a wonderful slaughter of the Assyrians, who fell under the hand of an angel. The suddenness of which accomplishment notwithstanding, he adds, *And this shall be a sign unto thee, Ye shall eat this year such things as grow of themselves, and in the second year that which springeth of the same; and in the third year sow ye, and reap, and plant vineyards, and eat the fruits thereof*². If then the worshipping God in Horeb was foretold as a sign of Moses his mission to rescue Israel out of Egypt, though it neither did nor could come to pass till after their rescue from thence; if the plenty of three successive years is made a sign of a deliverance, which yet followed in less than so many days after the promise of it; then it is plain, that to foretell a more remote event as a sign of one nearer at hand is not against the course of prophetic Scripture. Consequently, the birth of Christ being made a sign of Judah's deliverance from the present attempts of Israel and Syria, as it is agreeable to the reason of the thing, so is it likewise supported by examples of the like nature in the book of God. We are not therefore chargeable with absurdity or dishonesty for fixing upon this interpretation. We insist, that though the order in which each shall come be not necessary, yet it is absolutely so that both the thing promised and the sign should be subsequent to the promise. And from hence we infer, by unavoidable consequence, that by the child, whose birth is here foretold in the reign of Ahaz, could not possibly be meant his son Hezekiah³. For he succeeded his father after a reign of sixteen years, and was himself then five and twenty years old. Therefore the absurdity and perversion lies all on their side who seek to elude this prophecy by applying it to Hezekiah. That is indeed to make it foretell a child yet to be-born who had been born at least nine or ten years before the words were spoken.

2. The second remark, which I take to be also a very obvious one, is, that the birth here foretold is of an extraordinary and miraculous kind. And such we believe our blessed Lord's to have been, who alone answered the character here given of him by having a virgin mother. This strictest interpretation of the place, as it best agrees with the etymology and general use of the original word, which we render *virgin*, so is it especially enforced by the circumstances of the context. For after the refusal of *Ahaz to ask a sign of God, either in the height or depth*, in confirmation of a promise, thought too great to be credible, the prophet here gives the house of David this sign of a virgin conceiving and bearing a son. Hence it is evident

¹ Exod. iii. 10, 11, 12.

² 2 Kings xix. 29; Isaiah xxxvii. 30.

³ 2 Kings xvi. 2. xviii. 2.

that the use of signs is to awaken men's observation, and to add life and vigour to their faith in difficult cases. And how shall this be done, but by consisting of events out of the common way of expectation, such as transcend the power of natural causes and effects, and plainly demonstrate an interposition of the Almighty's own hand? But if no more be meant here than what the Jews would make us believe, that a young woman, then a virgin, should be joined to a man, and be with child; what is there in all this fit to compose the house of David's fears in that day of consternation and distress? How could an ordinary and natural event assure an unexpected and extraordinary deliverance? But especially, how ridiculous (upon this supposal), how extremely trifling, is all that pomp and solemnity with which this prophecy is introduced! Surely that preface, *Hear ye now, ye house of David, &c.—The Lord himself shall give you a sign—and that awakening of their attention, Behold, a virgin, &c.* do import, not only some strange and supernatural effect, but one that should be more full of astonishment than any that Ahaz could have asked. And hence I take it to be very manifest that this prophecy cannot be confined to the son of the prophetess, or any other, born after the manner of men; and that it never was fulfilled truly, and in the sense of him that gave it, except in the event which we are now thanking God for—the miraculous conception and birth of Jesus Christ alone.

II. I pass now, secondly, to the distinction peculiar to this wonderful child, in those words, and *shalt call his name Emmanuel*. Could any stress fairly be laid upon the word *shalt call*, I should think it another intimation of a truly virgin mother, by lodging in her that power of naming the child; which, by the laws and customs of the Jews, was always the father's prerogative. But I think it cannot be denied that *thou shalt*, or *she shall call*, in the prophet's, and *thou shalt*, or *they shall call*, in the evangelists^u, are terms exactly equivalent: and in general that such forms are frequently of no other importance than that which at last resolves itself into a passive signification. Of this many instances might easily be produced, which must abundantly satisfy us that the meaning of this passage is properly thus much—*his name shall be called Emmanuel*.

It is of more weight to shew how this part of the prediction can belong to him, whose name we acknowledge to have been, by express command from heaven, called *Jesus*^x. Now nothing is more common in Scripture than by the calling or naming of a person or thing, to mean that person's or thing's really being what that name imports: and so again, for *being called* to stand generally for *being*. In the former sense we find it foretold of Jerusalem by this prophet, that she should be called *the city of righteousness*. Why? Because, as was promised in the words foregoing, *God would restore her judges as at the first, and her counsellors as at the beginning*^y. In the latter sense it is twice used by the angel in the Gospel for this day^z. Who says of Jesus that *he shall be great, and shall be called* (that is, shall be)

^u Isaiah vii. 14. ^v Matt. i. 21, 23. ^x Luke i. 31. ii. 31; Matt. i. 21. ^y Isaiah i. 26.

^z Luke i. 31.

the Son of the Highest; and again, *That holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called* (that is, again, *shall be*) the Son of God^a.

Without proving this therefore by a multitude of instances which might make it endless, or recurring to the critical distinctions of natural and instituted names, which a learned writer of our own hath shewed to be in this case frivolous and prevaricating^b; it shall suffice to say, that, according to the usage of the Jewish, more especially the prophetic language, the name of a person or thing so called imported only such qualities or effects in or from it as that name signified. And by consequence, that Christ's name was truly and strictly called *Immanuel*, in full and punctual completion of this prophecy, if he were *God with us* (which is the adequate meaning of the Hebrew word), in so distinguishing a manner as none besides ever was or can be.

Now (not to mention that presence of God whereby he is in every place and with every person, and which cannot be the meaning of the name we are considering) there is a presence of favour and distinction whereby God is said to be in a peculiar manner with those whom he loves and blesses above others. In this regard the child here spoken of is justly called *Immanuel*; because, as St. Paul speaks, *God was in him reconciling the world unto himself*^c; for his sake and sufferings *not imputing their trespasses unto them*; and again, by him they, who *were sometime afar off, are made nigh, have access to the Father*^d, *are accepted in the beloved*^e, and become, of enemies and strangers, friends and children; insomuch that God vouchsafes to dwell in us and be one with us. And as he unites us to himself by grace, so did he in this child condescend, by an ineffable generation, to unite our substance and nature to himself; to be *perfect God and perfect man*^f, that so he might be the *firstborn among many brethren*^g, and *redeem the children from death, who are partakers of flesh and blood, by himself taking part of the same*^h. Let it not then be any more objected that the child in this prophecy could not be called *Immanuel*, whom we confess to have been called *Jesus*; for he is therefore our *Immanuel*, because our *Jesus*; therefore most eminently, most literally *God with us*, because by so miraculous an union a *saver of his people from their sins*.

But (lastly) as the name *Immanuel* leads us to contemplate the reality of our Saviour's Divine nature, so does the description which follows help us yet more to a thankful sense of his inimitable condescension. For by adding, *Butter and honey shall he eat, that, or until, he know to refuse the evil and choose the good*, the prophet is reasonably supposed to signify to us, not only the reality of our Saviour's human nature, but all the frailties and infirmities of it, which might render him, as the apostle speaks, in every point *like unto us*, sin alone exceptedⁱ. The *first Adam* was created in the utmost maturity and perfection both of body and mind that any of the species ever attained to; but the *second Adam*, though the *Lord from heaven*^k, vouchsafed to enter the world a tender babe, stooped to the weak-

^a Ver. 35.^b Bishop Kidder on the Messiah, p. i. ch. i. p. ii. ch. 5.^c 2 Cor. v. 19.^d Eph. ii. 13, 18, 19.^e Eph. i. 6.^f Athan. Creed.^g Rom. viii. 29.^h Heb. ii. 14.ⁱ Heb. ii. 17, iv. 15.^k 1 Cor. xv. 47.

nesses of infancy and the gradual progressions of youth. His body was nourished with the food administered in those countries to common children, and his understanding brightened like theirs, and received enlargements proportionable to his years. So that Isaiah here foretells, in other terms, what St. Luke relates to have been exactly fulfilled, when acquainting us that *the child grew, and waxed strong in spirit, filled with wisdom*; and again, that *Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man*¹.

There are many useful inferences arising from this subject, which having touched upon formerly^m I forbear now to repeat. Let it therefore suffice at present briefly to observe the reverence that becomes the devotions appointed for and the glorious preeminence due to this happy day. For this is the day that began first to scatter the thick night of ignorance and error, and the veil of types and shadows, in which till then mankind were all involved. The day which of right begins our ecclesiastical year, because on it the redemption and true life of mankind was first put into motion, by the Author and Giver of it taking our substance in the womb of his holy mother. The day that, by this wonderful operation, began to reconcile, not only God and man, but the word of God with itself; and is the common centre of agreement and union between the Old and the New Testament. The day, in short, whose honour it is that to the glorious events set forward in it the mysterious proceedings of four thousand years had been made subservient. And therefore, on this day especially, let us be glad and rejoice, and give glory and praise and humble adoration to God the Father, *creating this new thing*ⁿ; to God the Son incarnate; and to God the Holy Ghost overshadowing, Three Persons, and One God, for ever and ever. Amen.

THE GOSPEL. St. Luke i. 26.

26 *And in the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God unto a city of Galilee, named Nazareth,* 26. In the sixth month after the message to Zacharias, and his wife Elizabeth's conceiving, as had been foretold (see ver. 23, 24), the same angel (ver. 19) was sent, &c.

27 *To a virgin espoused to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David; and the virgin's name was Mary.* 27. To a virgin of the house of David, after her espousals to, but before any cohabitation with Joseph, a man of the same house. (Compare St. Matt. i. 18, &c. also Matt. i. 6—16, and Luke ii. 3, 4, 5.)

28 *And the angel came in unto her, and said, Hail, thou that art highly favoured, the Lord is with thee: blessed art thou among women.* 28. Thou to whom God hath shewed the peculiar favour of making thee a subject of blessing to all generations above the rest of thy sex.

29 *And when she saw him, she was troubled at his saying, and cast in her* 29. These words of the angel she was in great con-

¹ Luke ii. 40, 52.

^m See Gospel for Christmas-day and Sunday after Christmas.

ⁿ Jer. xxxi. 22.

mind what manner of salutation this should be.

30 And the angel said unto her, Fear not, Mary: for thou hast found favour with God.

31 And, behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and bring forth a son, and shalt call his name JESUS.

32 He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest: and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David:

33 And he shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of his kingdom there shall be no end.

Psalm lxxxix. 36, 37. cxxxii. 12, 13; Isaiah ix. 6, 7; Dan. ii. 44. vii. 13, 14; Micah iv. 7.)

34 Then said Mary unto the angel, How shall this be, seeing I know not a man?

35 And the angel answered and said unto her, The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee: therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God.

36 And, behold, thy cousin Elisabeth, she hath also conceived a son in her old age: and this is the sixth month with her, who was called barren.

37 For with God nothing shall be impossible.

38 And Mary said, Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it unto me according to thy word. And the angel departed from her.

cern and deep thought with herself to understand the true importance of.

31. As was prophesied of thee long since by Isaiah, ch. vii. 14.

32, 33. This Person, that Son of God, that great and eternal King, of whom so many glorious predictions and characters are left us by the prophets. (See 2 Sam. vii. 14; 1 Chron. xxii. 10; Dan. ii. 44. vii. 13, 14; Micah iv. 7.)

34. This question is not to be understood as proceeding from disbelief, but only from wonder, and a desire to be satisfied how events so strange should be brought to pass.

35. This shall not be an ordinary birth. For as the Person to be born is Divine and essentially God, so the operation by which thou shalt conceive him is altogether Divine, and owing to the Holy Spirit.

36, 37. God hath already begun to work wonders on this occasion by removing a natural obstruction from Elisabeth, and giving her strength to conceive beyond

all natural capacity and expectation: and this (as will more eminently appear in thy case) is a work of Omnipotence, to which nothing is hard.

38. Here she expresses her consent, her humility, her faith, and her rejoicing in this gracious purpose of God.

COMMENT.

WE have here an account of the glorious mystery of our Lord's incarnation, intermixed with such a description of his blessed mother's virtues, as seem to have inclined Almighty God to make choice of her for the happy instrument of conveying this inestimable mercy to mankind. Having therefore, upon the portion of Scripture appointed for

the Epistle, treated of the former of these points, we will endeavour to do due honour to the saint of this day, by taking such a view of her excellent graces as the Gospel now read does plainly set before us.

I. The first of these is that contained in the character of her state, the purity and chastity of a virgin. A heart free from vain imaginations, loose desires, and unsullied with all those filthy pollutions that defile and deform the wanton and unclean soul. Of all vices to which mankind are subject, there are none of greater danger and worse consequences to us than those which the lusts of our flesh tempt us to. None to which nature is more prone; none, by which it is more vilely debased, more shamefully exposed, more mortally wounded. They blind the eyes of the mind, destroy consideration and thought, drag down the affections to short and sordid pleasures, leave no relish, no inclinations to joys that are either religious or manly; fix us in a hatred and neglect of God, and enslave us to the appetites of brutes. No sins are more reproachful and ignominious; no life more perplexed with troubles and cares and vexations; no enjoyments so mean and bestial, nor so full of folly and shame and dreadful allays as those of the lascivious and impure man. But when these temptations happen to get the dominion over women, besides all other inconveniences that attend them, there is something so very odious, something that seems such a violence and affront to the modesty of their sex, that nothing can render them more despicable and abhorred in the eyes both of God and man.

Most justly therefore does the virtue opposite to this procure a good esteem and great favour; since by it men are conquerors of the strongest and subtlest enemy, and have learnt to be deaf to the busiest and most importunate solicitations of a siren that labours perpetually to ruin them by her treacherous enchantments. By it they secure their native freedom and greatness of spirit; preserve their faculties from those thick unwholesome mists by which sense and appetite ungoverned darken their sight; secure order and peace within, by subduing all rebellious passions, and keeping reason and religion constantly supreme; fixing the affections upon things most worthy of them, and exercising the mind in the sweet raptures of meditations and prayers, the thirst of spiritual and eternal comforts, and all the unspeakable delights which result from holy conversation, contempt of the world, and the fervent love of God. These are the praises, these the qualities of a truly virgin life. Not that which is so with regard to outward circumstances only, but that which is so in the inward disposition, in the choice and the purity of the soul, in a wilful and happy ignorance of evil.

And with respect to these good qualities, these noble and resigned hearts, it is, that such glorious things are spoken of virgins in Scripture. For as St. Paul says of the Jew, so must it be said in this case, *He is not a Jew, which is one outwardly; neither is that circumcision, which is outward in the flesh: but he is a Jew, which is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter; whose praise is not of men, but of God.* It is not

the singleness of life, but all that modesty and purity which are figured by it and ornaments of it, that recommends men to God. The Divine Spirit flies from deceit, and removes far from folly, and will not abide when unrighteousness cometh in (*says Solomon*). The unspotted mind makes the body a temple fit for the Holy Ghost. And because that part of Mary was clean and unblemished, because she was entirely devoted to piety, and abominated the very thoughts of filthiness, therefore was she *highly favoured*. It was her chaste and virgin heart that prevailed with the Son of God, when he took upon him to deliver man, not to abhor or disdain her virgin womb. And of such virgins as these it is that St. John speaks, when he says they are clothed with white robes, and have the honour in the new Jerusalem to attend upon the person of Christ, and *follow the Lamb whithersoever he goeth*⁹. A bright and shining innocence, which with good care may be preserved in any condition of life; and such, whereof even celibacy itself and all the affected vows of it are but too often destitute.

Secondly, another grace very conspicuous in this blessed virgin is humility. In the whole account of this affair we find no circumstance that speaks her exalted with the thoughts of this revelation to intemperate joy, or lofty conceits of herself; no pleasing reflections upon her own virtue, nor any of those things that are usually looked upon as symptoms of pride and arrogance. How natural, indeed how almost unavoidable, may we think it in such a case for a woman to be transported with being thus preferred above the rest of her sex, and enjoying such tokens of the Divine favour as none ever did, none ever should beside herself; to be tempted to look down with some sort of pity and contempt upon mankind in the retrieving of whom she was thus made instrumental, and to think something extraordinary due to that person whom the King of heaven thus delighted to honour, by joining her substance and human nature to his own Divine nature! But instead of all this, she receives the astonishing message with modesty and meekness and awful wonder; and seems to make no other use of the strangeness of the thing than from thence to entertain the mystery with a becoming reverence, and to be more amazed at the greatness of the condescension: *Behold the handmaid of the Lord*—and, *He hath regarded the low estate of his handmaid*—and, *God hath done to me great things*—and, *He hath exalted them of low degrees*—and, *He hath filled the hungry with good things*. These are the meditations that rise in her heart; these the meek and modest expressions by which she gives vent to that joy which the embassy of an angel, the salutation of her cousin Elizabeth, and the exultings of a babe yet unborn produced in her. A joy than which never was any more justly indulged; and yet so indulged as only to be profuse in the praises of God and the depressions of herself.

Now this deportment could not but be the effect of an excellent spirit, a long confirmed habit, of that quality of which God hath declared himself particularly fond. *For though the Lord be high, yet hath he respect to the lowly*, says the Psalmist⁷. *With the lowly is wisdom*⁸.

⁹ Wisdom i. 4, 5.⁹ Rev. xiv. 4.⁷ Psalm cxxxviii. 6.⁸ Prov. xi. 2.

and *before honour is humility*^t, says the Wise Man. *I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit*^u, says God himself by Isaiah. And *God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace to the humble*^x, says the apostle. And our blessed Saviour upon several occasions inculcates that sentence, *He that exalteth himself shall be abased, but he that humbleth himself shall be exalted*^y. This is accordingly recommended as a jewel of great price in women^z; an ornament much more beautiful in the sight of God than any of those by which they are so studious to set their bodies off to the eyes of the world.

And therefore the height of that favour mentioned here may very reasonably be ascribed to the perfection of this most charming, I had almost said this divine virtue. Indeed why should I not call it divine, since as none is better beloved, so none was ever more eminently, more visibly practised by God himself? For who can sufficiently admire that meekness and unspeakable condescension by which the King of heaven emptied himself of all his glories, left his throne on high, and took his abode in the body of a mean virgin; vouchsafed to be born in poverty, to live in contempt, to become the minister and the servant of many, and submitted to the death of slaves and malefactors? Who shall compare any other accomplishment with this, after such an example? Who shall wonder that, since it thus behoved Christ to live and suffer, it behoved him thus to be born too, that a parent should be chosen so resembling the virtues of her Son? And who shall hereafter fear the disparaging or degrading of himself by humility, who sees the human nature of Christ exalted to the right hand of God, and a meek virgin lifted above the fate of common women, and made the mother of the holy and eternal Jesus for excelling in it?

Thirdly. St. Luke takes notice of one grace more, very remarkable in the Virgin upon this occasion, which is her faith. And this, in a matter so foreign, so wholly new, so mysterious, and above the power of all created nature, is very extraordinary. It is true indeed she questioned the angel (ver. 34), *How shall this be, seeing I know not a man?* But that was in a sense very different from Zachary's at the eighteenth verse, *Whereby shall I know this?* He questioned the messenger, because he looked upon himself as deluded. She doubted not the truth nor the authority of the message; but desired satisfaction only as to the manner of bringing about an event altogether unusual, and for which she saw no competent means. Less than this could not be done to save her credulity; and more than this she insisted not upon to indulge her curiosity. For when it was declared that the operation should be God's; that however strange this might appear, yet his power knew no bounds; and as an evidence that it did not, how he had already exerted it in a very wonderful instance, that of giving a child to persons of her own kindred, whom both age and nature had made barren, and cut off from all expectations of such a blessing; when once, I say, this had been declared, she raises no

^t Ch. xv. 33. ^u Isaiah lvii. 15. ^x James iv. 6. ^y Luke xiv. 11. ^z 1 Pet. iii. 4.

fresh scruples, nor urges any of those difficulties which to human reason are insuperable, but returns this submissive answer, at once declaring her expectation that it would, and her desires that it might be so; *Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it unto me according to thy word.* She left God to finish his own work in his own way, not doubting but his omnipotence would take care of his truth. She offered herself the contented, the ready, nay the glad object of this miracle, for Heaven to fulfil all its good pleasure upon. This, without dispute, is the importance of the Virgin's reply; and accordingly we find her carriage thus interpreted by Elizabeth to her mighty commendation: (ver. 45.) *Blessed is she that believed: for there shall be a performance of those things which were told her from the Lord.* This was a noble resignation, and fit for her whose Son was to plant a religion built upon faith. And where such virtues as these conspire, where each is so eminent, each so acceptable, we may allow the person to be full of grace; and discern reason sufficient why this bright constellation should render her lovely in God's eyes, and highly favoured by him.

I conclude with exhorting my readers to consider, that as Christ was born for us, so he must likewise be born in us, if we expect the benefit of his most stupendous incarnation. That is, his likeness and image must be formed in our souls, we must express his virtues and dispositions, and be one with him in affections, if ever we be united to him in glory. And here this holy mother is our emblem and our pattern. For the same qualities which recommended her to that high honour are necessary to invite Him to dwell in our hearts. We must be sure to provide him a clean habitation, a house swept and garnished; purged from the filth and dregs of fleshly and impure desires, and adorned with graces and good works. Especially we must be clothed with humility; so eminent in this Virgin, so delightful to God, so conformable to all the practice, to all the precepts, of the meek and lowly Jesus; without which it is utterly impossible for any man to be like unto him or be loved by him. And we must fix and confirm our minds with a steadfast and unblamable faith; a modest and resigned belief of all the deep and glorious mysteries of the Christian religion; a lively and active principle, such as may invigorate and quicken us, render us indefatigable and constant in well-doing, fruitful and exemplary, to the glory of God and the good of others; such as may fire us with a commendable emulation of the blessed above, and teach us so to commemorate their crowns, as to aspire after them too by copying their virtues. This is to honour the Virgin indeed, when we conform ourselves to her in pure and virgin hearts; this, to celebrate the conception of Jesus, when we conceive him afresh, by a spiritual and mystical regeneration; this, lastly, is the only method so to receive the glad tidings of his incarnation and to improve by that message of the angel, as, by qualifying ourselves for the happy influences of his most meritorious death and passion, to partake in the glories of his resurrection. Which if we heartily endeavour, as we are taught now to pray, God will hear the devotions of this festival, and grant them, for the sake of the same his Son Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

ST. MARK'S DAY.

A short Account of St. Mark.

ST. MARK is, in the Preface to St. Jerome's Comment on his Gospel, said to be by descent a Levite. They who make him one of the seventy disciples forget what Eusebius^a affirms out of Papias, that he never heard or followed Jesus at all. It is much disputed whether he be the same with that John surnamed Mark, mentioned Acts xii. and xv., as the attendant, first of Paul and Barnabas; afterwards, when those two apostles parted, of the latter, whose sister's son he was^b. This is the reason by which most have been induced to conclude our evangelist not to be the same, as thinking those travels with Paul and Barnabas inconsistent with that constant retainure to St. Peter which is generally reported of our St. Mark.

But what weight soever this argument may have, several learned persons are by no means convinced by it. A late learned historian^c declares himself so far from seeing any necessary consequence in it, as to say, that Mark, the kinsman of Barnabas, is without doubt the same with him who wrote the Gospel that goes under St. Mark's name, and is generally supposed to be written while he was under the direction of St. Peter. And our learned Pearson manifestly inclines to this opinion^d. He presumes the reason of Mark returning with Barnabas and Saul to Antioch (when they had delivered the charitable collections, Acts xi, xii.) was, that St. Peter's absence from Jerusalem at that time gave him leisure so to do^e. He adds, that the kindness and acquaintance between Peter and Barnabas, the uncle of Mark, was the most intimate that could be; and imputes to this the compliance shewed by Barnabas to St. Peter's behaviour among the Judaizers at Antioch, and the disagreement which afterwards separated St. Paul and him in their travels. The question is not of any great consequence; but far from being given up on the one side, though perhaps more generally asserted on that other, which holds that these are two different Marks.

Be that as it will, the Gospel we now enjoy under that name is agreed to be written by the author when accompanying St. Peter, and the occasion of writing it to be this^f: After the defeat of Simon Magus, the reputation of our faith grew so great and the converts to it so many at Rome, that they were desirous to have in writing those doctrines which had hitherto been imparted to them by word of mouth only. St. Mark, to whom this request was made, did accordingly set himself to recollect what he by long conversation had learned from St. Peter^g. This writing from his own memory is rendered as a reason both for the brevity of the narration, and the order of facts being less exact. To the setting about this work, it is said, that although Peter neither gave countenance nor discountenance, yet, when finished, he

^a Lib. iii. 39.
ann. 44.

^b Col. iv. 10.
^c Ad ann. 50.

^d Le Sueur ed ann. Chr. 60.
^e Euseb. Hist. ii. 15. v. 8. vi. 14.

^f Annal. Paul. ed
^g Euseb. lib. 39.

perused, approved, and recommended it to the use of the churches^a. There is indeed a passage in Irenæusⁱ importing that this Gospel was not written till after St. Peter's death. But the general current of antiquity favours the former account; and it is very remarkable that Eusebius^k, when quoting that same passage from Irenæus, hath not one syllable concerning Peter's death. To which we may add, that though the most ancient writers give us now no particulars of St. Mark's death, yet those who do seem to place it before that of St. Peter^l.

Having written his Gospel, he is said to have left Italy, which had enjoyed the benefit of his labours for some time, and to have carried it with him to Alexandria in Egypt, where he first preached Christ, constituted a bishopric, and was succeeded in it by Anianus^m. The Ascetic Christians, there said to be an order founded by him, seem to be mistaken for Jewsⁿ. For such were the then Gentiles, whose rulers Philo so highly extols, that those very commendations render their Christianity suspected. After some time spent in Alexandria, St. Mark is said to have gone through Libya, Marmorica, and Pentapolis. And after his return to Alexandria, to have been murdered there, about Easter, at which time of the year extraordinary honours used to be paid to Serapis. The Egyptians, in zeal for this idol, seized St. Mark as he was officiating in his Christian church, tied his feet with cords, and dragged him about the streets and rocks, till, the skin and flesh being torn off, he at last expired under the torture.

THE COLLECT.

O ALMIGHTY God, who hast instructed thy holy Church with the heavenly doctrine of thy Evangelist Saint Mark; Give us grace, that, being not like children carried away with every blast of vain doctrine, we may be established in the truth of thy holy Gospel; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen^o.

THE EPISTLE. Eph. iv. 7.

7 Unto every one of us is given grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ. 7. To each Christian (so many ways united to all his fellow-Christians, as before, ver. 4, 5, 6), are imparted such assistances as the wisdom and bounty of Christ, our common Head, thinks proper.

8 Wherefore he saith, When he ascended up on high, he led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men. 8. And this distribution was long since foretold by David, who (Ps. lxxviii.) describes the Messiah mounting his throne in heaven, and (as an evidence of the majesty and power to which his human nature was now advanced) after an entire conquest of the enemies of his kingdom,

^a Comp. Eus. Hist. vi. 14. and ii. 15. ⁱ Iren. iii. 1. ^k Euseb. v. 8. ^l Le Sueur, ann. 62. 1b. ann. 65. Pears. 69. ^m Nazianz. in Arrian. Euseb. ubi sup. Chrys. in 12. Ap. Hieron. in Catal. ⁿ See Val. in Euseb. ii. 17. ^o Eph. iv. 14, 15.

scattering his gifts, as is usual among men on days of inaugurations and triumphs.

9 (*Now that he ascended, what is it but that he also descended first into the lower parts of the earth?*) 9. Now that expression of ascending up on high hath reference to some former coming down. And so did this King and Conqueror descend from the utmost height, when incarnate, and vouchsafing to live on this earth; and yet more so when not disdaining to die, and be buried in it.

10 *He that descended is the same also that ascended up far above all heavens, that he might fill all things.* 10. He therefore is now returned back to his heavenly throne, the highest and most glorious that can be, to exercise an universal dominion, and diffuse his influences over every part of his mystical body the church.

11 *And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers;* 11. To which purpose it is that he qualified persons for and sent them in the several capacities here mentioned; some to reveal, some to foretell and explain his will; some to propagate and record it; others to govern according to, and instruct in it where it was already received.

12 *For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ:* 12. Now these several offices, and the powers for performing them, were all designed for the benefit of the body in common: every party concerned was hereby obliged to contribute his best endeavours for the improvement and mutual support of believers, for the faithful discharge of his own proper post, and for the peace and unity of this body.

13 *Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ:* 13. Again, the end of such improvement is, that by the unanimous confession of and strict adherence to the same principles of our religion, and by a competent knowledge of Christ and his gospel, we all should rise to and meet together in such degrees of piety and perfection as are esteemed the maturity and full growth of Christians, according to those measures of each whereof our nature and state is capable.

14 *That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive;* 14. By these means we shall attain to such steadiness and sound judgment, as may set us above that childish ignorance and levity which floats between different opinions, and is carried into this or that with every sophistical turn of an argument; managed by crafty seducers, who use their utmost industry to corrupt the Christian doctrine.

15 *But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ:* 15. Such unity in opinion and affection among the members will unite and endear us more and more to Christ our mystical head;

16 *From whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love.* 16. From whose influences, derived through the whole spiritual, each member of this (like the natural) body, according to the powers it receives and the position in which it stands, contributes to the strength and beauty of the whole, by discharging its own function faithfully, and promoting that which is the proper health and growth of this body, unity of faith, and active charity diffused through all the parts of it.

COMMENT.

THE verses next before had given a description of that mystical union in the Christian church, which St. Paul here makes use of as an argument for enforcing that *unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace*, which he at the third verse exhorts his Ephesians by all possible means to *keep*°. The particular bands or ligaments by which Christians are thus knit together are there instanced in, and urged as so many indispensable obligations to a godly agreement in opinion and affection. The nature of this union, represented in Scripture under several similitudes, hath been illustrated with regard to each that came before us in some preceding discourses^p. The passage we are now concerned in proceeds to shew what means and assistances our blessed Lord hath left us for the establishment and preservation of this union. What ends he had in ordaining, and what we should constantly propose to ourselves in using those means and assistances. These two points therefore shall make the heads of what I intend to lay down on the present occasion. For indeed they are the whole substance of the Epistle for the day. The former being insisted on from the seventh to the twelfth, the latter from the twelfth verse to the end of this portion of Scripture.

The apostle's argument here is much the same with that more largely expatiated upon in the twelfth of the First Epistle to the Corinthians. The gifts in both places are chiefly those supernatural ones, which the extraordinary occasions of a religion, to be proved and planted by miracles, did require at its first setting out into the world.

These gifts have been thought by some to have accompanied the sanctifying graces of baptism in the first beginnings of Christianity; and for some time to be imparted to the generality of private believers^q; as a mark of God's favour, a visible pledge of his acceptance of their own conversion, and a powerful motive to that of other people. But they who do not allow those distributions to have been so extensive seem not at all to doubt but that every one called in those early days to the public ministry did, in some kind and measure or other, partake of them. Now according to the different quality of such gifts, and the different stations and offices in which they were

° Ver. 4, 5, 6.

^p See Epistle for the first Sunday after Epiphany, and the Epistle for St. Thomas's day.^q See Chrysostom on 1 Cor. xii.

exercised, the persons so endued were distinguished under different titles and characters. An example hereof we have in the eleventh verse of this chapter, and at the latter end of that twelfth chapter to the Corinthians, where I have already observed that St. Paul enlarges upon the same subject.

At this so great a distance of time, and in circumstances of the present, so very unlike to those of the primitive church, it is perhaps not possible, to be sure not necessary, nicely to determine the bounds of those several offices, and the precise importance of the names by which they who then bore them are styled. But withal it is easy to discern that some among them are of such a nature as renders them of perpetual use and necessity. Those I mean whose business chiefly consists in authority to govern and commission to instruct. And accordingly when all miraculous operations, and all occasion for the workers of them ceased, care was taken to preserve and continue a constant succession of the rest. For though there be now no longer, nor have been for many ages, healers, nor speakers with tongues, nor interpreters, nor discerners of spirits, nor prophets, as heretofore there were; yet are there still (and it is fit there should be to the world's end) men who for the spiritual power and rule they succeed into may not improperly be termed apostles; and others who, for their labours in the work of exhortation and doctrine, and watching over and feeding the flock under their respective charge, are, in the very strictest sense of the words, *pastors* and *teachers* in the church of Christ.

From this account of the means and assistances afforded to the primitive Christians, and of those continued to all ages of Christianity, it seems a thing very natural and fitting to make these following remarks:

1. Though the end to be promoted by such means be, as we shall shortly see it is, one and immutable, yet the methods made use of to serve and compass that end have been many. Not the same in succeeding as in the more early ages of our religion; but varied according to different times and circumstances, and dispensed in such kinds and measures as the wisdom of God saw proper to each of them.

2. Such diversity of means and dispensations notwithstanding, we have no manner of reason to question a constant supply of them that are sufficient. And consequently, if the distributions in our time be more sparing than those we read and hear of formerly, this comes to pass, not because God is less intent upon the great purposes to be furthered by them, or partially fond of one generation above another, but because the necessities of his church required a more liberal hand at one time, and the more settled condition of it at another time, might be very well provided for by a less expensive supply.

3. Be the means and assistances afforded more or less, our duty with regard to them continues still the same. Which is, at all times to make the best of the helps and opportunities we have; and to take due care that what is sufficient in its own nature (and would be so with just improvement as to our own particular) do not prove ineffectual to the great ends here mentioned through any neglect or fault of ours. Now this care is then duly taken by persons in public

character, when they exercise their respective functions and trusts diligently and conscientiously: and, like faithful stewards, render their high stations and larger talents as serviceable to the cause of God and religion as possibly they can. And it is taken by those in a private capacity then, and only then, whom they submit to their spiritual governors in all lawful ordinances; when they adhere steadfastly to the *pastors* and *teachers* regularly called and set over them; when they employ their utmost endeavours to profit by their holy labours, count them *worthy of all honour*, and (abstracting from other considerations) *esteem them very highly*, (as this apostle elsewhere enjoins,) even for their character, and *for their work's sake*¹.

4. Since it hath pleased God that the extraordinary means and assistances once vouchsafed to his church should be long ago withdrawn, and that some others here specified should still remain; this seems very evidently to warrant our inferring that it is our Lord's will these latter should always continue; and that their continuance is necessary to the very being and constitution of the Christian church. For what account can any reasonable man render to himself of such a difference put between these two sorts of gifts, but that the necessity of the former was temporary and occasional only, whereas that of the latter is perpetual and indispensable?

It may be, and indeed it hath been, very often and very maliciously objected, (though never, I think, so often or so maliciously objected as in the profligate age wherein we live,) that such orders and offices are now superfluous, when the secular powers are Christian, and the book of life in every hand: so that the civil magistrate suffices to govern us, and all of common industry and understanding are abundantly qualified to teach themselves.

But to this the answer is plain and easy, and, to men of probity and fair argument, would not fail to be satisfactory too; viz. that the societies in which these governments are exercised are different. The civil is a particular state or country; the spiritual, a church diffused wheresoever Christians happen to be throughout the whole world. That the powers they claim and exercise are different; different in their original, for the civil was given by God to men, and is regulated by the municipal laws and customs of each nation; whereas the spiritual was given by God to Christ (whom he thus made *head over all things to the church*²), conferred by Christ on his apostles, derived down by them to their successors, and in all its essential parts the same all the Christian world over. They are also different in their objects; the one extending to the lives, liberties, and secular interests, the other to the minds and consciences of its subjects. They are, lastly, different in their ends too, the one aiming at the safety and welfare of their bodies and estates in this present world; the other, at the salvation of their souls in that which is to come.

That these powers consequently can neither of them be qualified to discharge the business of the other: that they are so perfectly distinct as to have nothing of danger to apprehend from each other: that they are so contrived as never, in their own nature, mutually to

¹ 1 Thess. v. 13.

² Eph. i. 32.

interfere; and that they never actually did, never can interfere in their exercise, except when one of these powers is abused and stretched beyond its due and proper limits. And lastly, that this spiritual government being instituted by Christ himself cannot be abrogated, ought not to be changed, by any authority less sacred, any declaration less positive and express, than that by which it was at first established. Which (we have reason to believe) would not be wanting, were it, in his judgment, mischievous or unnecessary: but for any man to pronounce it so, without any such signification from its Author, is certainly most impudent sacrilege, and even raging impiety.

This for the governing; then for the teaching part, do not the many millions of ignorant souls, notwithstanding the most free access to the holy Scriptures, furnish us with too melancholy a proof of the necessity of it? If common understanding and industry would give men a competent knowledge of their duty; yet is it true that all have that degree of understanding, or that all who have cultivate it with that industry they may and ought to do? Admit they did. Yet is there no occasion for, no advantage to even them that know their duty best from an order of men who are bound to deal impartially with them in awakening their attention, searching their consciences, representing their dangers, quickening their endeavours, and frequently refreshing their memories in many things, which they are so far from carefully recollecting that the temptations and pleasures and cares of the world often prevail with them to use many arts, and take great pains to forget, and even drive them out of their thoughts?

But, waving all these arguments, are we to suppose that the whole of a pastor and teacher's office consists in that single point of instruction? No such matter. These are the persons authorized by God to transact the affairs of the second covenant between him and his people, called for that reason in Scripture his delegates, or *ambassadors*^t; to seal that covenant by visible signs and sacraments, and therefore said to *baptize men* for the *washing away of their sins*^u; to offer the commemorative sacrifice of their Lord's death, and therefore said to *bless*^x the holy elements at his table: these are appointed to declare the guilty conscience absolved or condemned, and in the name and by the declared power of their great Original, the great High Priest of our profession, to grant pardon upon certain conditions, and therefore said to *rebuke with all authority*^y, to *retain* and *remit the sins* of others^z. These are set between God and men to bless in his name, to intercede for their charges^a, with an express promise of being heard in those solemn mediations. In a word, these are declared to be *ordained for men in things pertaining to God*^b; and in that respect to have an honour conferred upon them *which no man taketh to himself but he that is called of God, as was Aaron*^c. By which is meant, that whoever usurps this office is an intruder; and that none who are not so called can perform any parts of it with the same efficacy and jurisdiction.

So far is this distinction from being an empty title; so impossible

^t 2 Cor. v. 20.

^u Acts xxii. 16.

^x 1 Cor. x. 16.

^y Titus ii. 15.

^z John xx. 23.

^a James v. 14, 15.

^b Heb. v. 1.

^c Var. 4.

to be at any time superfluous; and by consequence so justly to be concluded of perpetual duration, and even essential to the constitution of the Christian church. What less indeed can we conclude from the apostle's own words now before us than that, so long as there is a *body of Christ to be edified, and saints to be perfected*, there will always be occasion for the *work of the ministry*, and these orders of men separated by God to the discharge of it! For thus the substance of my first head is here connected with my second; the means for with the end of establishing the mystical union of Christians: *He gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ^d, &c.*

I have been the longer upon this head, with a design to shew how little ground there is either for the cavils of libertines who deny or of enthusiasts who despise the institution of these orders in the Christian church. And I hope what hath been said may suffice, as well to vindicate the persons exercising the authority proper to these characters from the tyranny and usurpation charged upon them by the former sort, as to invalidate the pretences of the latter, who vainly fancy themselves above any established dispensations. The indisputable dominion of the Fountain of these powers ought to silence all invidious reflections upon them to whom they have been regularly conveyed; and his infinite wisdom must convince all reasonable men that the ends which he appointed these as means to bring about they are certainly sufficient for. What those ends are, it is the design of my second general head, and I now proceed, to examine.

II. Now those which are more succinctly contained in the twelfth are explained more at large in the four following verses. And they may be reduced to two; unity of faith, and universal charity. Both which I shall treat of in such a manner as may be most agreeable to the scripture now under consideration. That of faith is thus expressed: *Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ: that we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive; but speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ^e.*

1. In order to understand the apostle's meaning aright, with regard to the former of these, which is unity of faith, we shall do well to take our first step by examining what may most probably be intended in those words, which seem more immediately to express the end to be attained from it, viz. *coming to a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ.*

Now perfection may be capable of several senses, according to the different subjects to which it is applied. In its highest and most absolute sense it signifies a state so elevated and complete, that as all defect, so all addition is excluded from it: and the being thus perfect not only actually is not, but cannot possibly be at any time more

^d Eph. iv. 11, 12.^e Eph. iv. 13, 14, 15.

or less, better or worse, than it is. Thus we affirm most truly of God, that he is perfect in holiness, in justice, in wisdom, in power, and the like. That is, there is no degree of these or any other excellencies attributed to the Divine nature, of which he is not in full possession. And what he stands thus possessed of can no more admit of diminution than of increase. But then it is very plain that this absolute perfection can truly be affirmed of God alone; because the very notion of it includes infinity and immutability. For whatsoever is not infinite may be greater and better; and whatsoever is not unchangeable may be less and worse. Since therefore none but God is infinite and unchangeable, it follows that none but God is or can be absolutely, and in the highest sense of the word, perfect.

When therefore perfection is attributed to any creature, we must understand it in a qualified sense; and such as is limited by the capacities of that creature in particular, at the time and in the circumstances the person or thing is when thus spoken of. Thus the perfection of a man consists in all those attainments of which a creature compounded of soul and body (considered as such) is capable. But this is a perfection belonging to none, except to the *first Adam* before his fall, and to that *second Adam, the Lord from heaven*, who for our sakes vouchsafed to take the human nature upon him. If then the word be used of any other, it can denote that perfection only which fallen man, under all the disadvantages of original corruption, but assisted by Divine grace, can, as matters now stand with the race of a lapsed ancestor, come up to. And this does not only fall infinitely below the complete perfection peculiar to God; but it stops vastly short even of that qualified perfection which the human nature in our first parents was (before their transgression and the fatal consequences thereupon) formed in and fitted for.

But our gracious God, by the second covenant, hath given us expectations of a future and better state, in which the infirmities of our present one shall be removed. And hence arises another distinction, termed in the schools the perfection of the way, and the perfection of our country, or journey's end. The former is such as is allowed to a condition of discipline and trial; the latter is reserved for that of our happiness and reward. And this is evidently St. Paul's meaning, where, speaking of knowledge particularly, he says, *We know in part, and we prophesy in part. But when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away*. As it seems to be also in that other place, where, after mention of attaining to the resurrection of the dead, he adds immediately, *Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect: but I follow after, &c. and press towards the mark &c.*

This last distinction deserves the greater notice, because it opens the way to another, exceeding useful (indeed absolutely needful) for understanding several passages in the New Testament. It is, that such degrees of many virtues are styled perfect, as, although they are not the utmost possible to be attained in our present state, are yet, according to the terms of the gospel covenant, sufficient to qualify us

for the perfection of our future and better state. It is thus that we read of perfection in *knowledge*, in *faith*, in *patience*, in *love*, and the like^b. All which do not, (as is plain from those last words of the apostle to the Philippians, joined with what follows at the fifteenth verse there, *Let us therefore, as many as be perfect, be thus minded, &c.*) all which, I say, do not shut out all possibility of farther improvements, but only imply such to have been already made as the duty of Christians does in each of those respects require. An instance or two will suffice to set this matter in a clearer light.

When the rich young man had expressed his desire of knowing what he must *do to inherit eternal life*, and had recited the commandments of the second table, as things observed by him *from his youth up*, he asks, *What lack I yet?* To this our Lord replies, *If thou wilt be perfect, go, sell that thou hast, and give to the poor^k, &c.* That is, if thou wouldest be fully instructed in the knowledge and conform to the practice of the Christian law in its just extent, thou must be ready to forsake all the advantages of this world, when obedience to any command of Christ shall render it necessary. An obligation which he was not before sensible that the love of God and his neighbour had laid upon him.

In the beginning of his First Epistle to the Corinthians, St. Paul had taken notice of the common prejudices against the gospel, and particularly against his manner of preaching it. This he tells them was recommended to the world by miracles, not *by excellency of speech, or the enticing words of man's wisdom^l*. But how much s^oever the want of these might be despised among persons ignorant of the reasons for so unusual a method, yet *we*, says he, *speak wisdom among them that are perfect*. That is, they who have a true knowledge of the nature of this doctrine are fully satisfied in, and have the highest value for, both the matter delivered, as most excellent in itself, and the manner of delivering it, as most suitable to the subject, and most wisely contrived for the effectual conviction of unbelievers.

Again. The Gnostics, among other corruptions, had taught men to tamper with their consciences, affirming it lawful to save one's self by denying Christ in times of persecution. Now St. John, to shew the baseness of this principle, says, *There is no fear in love; but perfect love casteth out fear. He that feareth is not made perfect in love^m*. That is, the love of God and Christ required of every Christian implies such ardency and constancy, as shall make and keep men in a continual disposition resolutely, and even cheerfully, to undergo any hardships and sufferings that can possibly befall them for the sake and on account of the profession of the faith. And no temper of mind short of this courage can answer the duty and character of those who call themselves disciples to a persecuted and crucified Master.

But what need we seek any farther than to the scripture now in hand for an illustration of this point? The very nature of the metaphors used here does in truth seem to me to import, above any other scripture whatsoever, that evangelical perfection must not always be

^b 1 Cor. ii. 6; James ii. 22; 1 John iv. 18.

^l 1 Cor. ii. 1—6.

^k Phil. iii. 11, &c.

^m 1 John iv. 17, 18.

^k Matt. xix. 16—21.

rigorously understood for the largest measures that any Christian may, but for so much as every Christian must, arrive at, to justify his hopes, and answer his character.

This, I apprehend, is sufficiently intimated by St. Paul, when comparing the growth and proportions of the spiritual to those of the natural man. For it is no way necessary to the perfection of the latter to have attained the largest measures of stature or strength that can be, or that ever have been or shall be, actually attained. But he is esteemed a perfect man who hath all the parts of body and mind in their just maturity. So neither is it required, to denominate the spiritual man perfect, that he have a clear and full comprehension of the mysteries of the Christian religion; or that he understand as much of them as ever any did or shall; but it suffices that he be rightly instructed in and thoroughly persuaded of those truths revealed in the gospel, which are the essential and distinguishing doctrines of this religion. And as the natural man when come to maturity may yet, by exercise and study, and other proper methods, confirm and add to the strength and vigour both of his mind and body; so may he, who in this sense is spiritually *perfect*, make daily increase of his faith and knowledge, by conversing much with the Scriptures, holy contemplation, acts of piety and virtue, and all those excellent arts, whereby they who make it their aim and business to excel in goodness improve and brighten the graces of God in their souls. In short, this is a perfection which supposes a measure short of which we cannot be men in Christ; but not a measure at which they who are once arrived either ought not to aspire or cannot rise above it.

That this is a manner of expression familiar to St. Paul, my reader will be abundantly satisfied, if to the marginal texts already referred to he add the consideration of Coloss. i. 28, 1 Cor. xiv. 20, but especially the latter end of the fifth and beginning of the sixth chapter to the Hebrews, compared with the three first verses of 1 Cor. iii. The last of which plainly implies that this distinction is not peculiar to such virtues as are intellectual only, but belongs to those moral and practical ones also which are opposite to envyings and strifes and divisions, on account whereof the Corinthians are there upbraided as *car-nal*, and *babes in Christ*.

From this account of perfection in private Christians, it will be no difficult matter to form a judgment of that unity in faith and knowledge required by the apostle. And I think we may safely conclude from hence,

1. That it is not meant of an agreement in or unanimous profession of all truths, no not all religious truths whatsoever. Considering the nature and the corruption, the ignorance and frailty, the avocations, the inadvertencies, the mistakes, and different capacities and interests of men, we have reason to think this so far from necessary, that it is not (ordinarily speaking) to be conceived possible. Since therefore, of points relating to religion, all are not of equal importance and concern, it suffices that those which are fundamental and essential, such as Christians are said by St. Paul to be *delivered to*^a, such as he calls *the form of sound words*, which must be *held fast*^o, and wherein the

^a Rom. vi. 17.

^o 2 Tim. i. 14.

substance of the covenant made in baptism does properly consist, be competently understood, firmly believed, and steadfastly continued in, by every Christian.

2. To shew how practicable this is, I observe again, that even of these fundamental doctrines so perfect and masterly a knowledge is not expected, that every man should be able to answer, or so much as to know, every cavil that may be started against them. The apostle expresses himself in terms that imply much less. He is content with such a faith as may set them above the levity of children, and secure them against the fraudulent arts of deceivers. And these are successful only when they meet with weak and unsettled minds. Now such steadiness and agreement will need good instruction in the articles and in the grounds of our belief. All which lies in a little compass, and may be reduced to a few plain scriptures. These will render men proof against those subtleties which they are not dexterous enough to unravel. For as the knowledge of a straight line discovers all that differ from it to be crooked, even to them by whom the numberless forms of those that do so cannot be accounted for particularly, so, to detect an imposture in this case, it will suffice to know the plain and fundamental truths of Christianity; and, without entangling oneself in nice disputes, resolutely to reject all that differs from and is inconsistent with these.

3. I observe once more, that this unity of faith is not only capable but necessary to be attained, even in those points of doctrine of which we cannot have a full and adequate comprehension. Accordingly St. Ambrose, on the place, interprets *the knowledge of the Son of God, and the fulness of Christ*, of confessing the divinity of our blessed Saviour. And this may be very rationally, and ought to be unanimously confessed. Because, though we cannot understand how the divine and human nature were united in his person, yet we may (and, if we will consider things impartially, we cannot but) see such forcible reasons for assenting to it as must needs render our unbelief highly blamable. Such are, that we ought to believe whatsoever eternal and essential Truth hath declared; that the Spirit of God, who is so, dictated the holy Scriptures; that he appears to have done this by all the arguments and evidences proper to prove a subject of that nature; that it is most reasonable to take the doctrinal parts of Scripture in their most obvious and literal meaning; that thus to expound the passages containing the mysteries of our religion is most agreeable to the propriety of those languages in which they were written. And they who are competent judges of those matters may soon be satisfied that the difficulties charged upon those Scriptures are not owing to any obscurity in the texts themselves, or the different acceptations of the ancients, who acknowledged these doctrines, but to the more modern perversions and wretched criticisms of those who have taken pains to darken and confound them.

So much for the first branch of unity, that of faith. Let us now proceed to the other, that of charity, which we find described in the sixteenth verse.

That part of it which relates to Christ, and the constant communi-

cations of grace from him, our common Head, to every member of his mystical body, hath been largely explained heretofore^p. At present I shall treat of the other part only, which concerns our own duty. And to the observations formerly made^q upon this also, I will add but just so much as may be serviceable to the illustration of the metaphor chosen to express it, by *the edifying of the body of Christ, and making increase of the body unto the edifying of itself*^r.

And here is the proper place for making good a former promise^s, of stating the true and scriptural notion of edification; which shall be done with all the plainness and brevity that I can.

But before I come to that, it may not be amiss to take some notice of another great end, wherein not the ministry only, but they also who live under it, may and ought to be instrumental, expressed in the twelfth verso by *the perfecting of the saints*. The word itself^t, translated by *perfecting*, is nowhere else to be found in the New Testament. But according to the force of its root, which often occurs there, and must direct us in this inquiry, we have reason to think that it is very capable of the following senses:

1. It may signify finishing, by a supply of that which was lacking to render it complete. Thus the apostle prays for the Corinthians' *perfection*, exhorts them to *be perfected*^u, and desires to see the Thessalonians, that he might *perfect that which was lacking in their faith*^v: all which he expresses by the word whence this is derived.

2. It may also signify mending any breach, or reducing any thing out of place. And thus the verb is used by two evangelists, where the fishermen are said to be *mending* their nets^w; and again by St. Paul, with allusion to a bone broken or out of joint, where he exhorts the Galatians, if any *be overtaken in a fault*, that they which are *spiritual should restore such a one in the spirit of meekness*^x.

3. Again: it is frequently taken for compacting the several parts of any whole, so as that there shall from thence result one entire and regular frame. Thus we find it used of God's *making* the world^y; of the body *prepared* for Christ, and fitted for a sacrifice^z; of the man of God *framed*, or, as we read, *thoroughly furnished*, to all good works^a; and of the *vessels of wrath* fitted (or, as our margin, *made up*) for destruction^b.

The design of St. Paul here is well answered by any or all of these significations. For the saints are then *perfected* in the first of them, when the several orders (said at the eleventh verse to be given for that purpose) do, by the regular and diligent administration of the word and sacraments, supply what is lacking, and finish every member of this society in the knowledge and practice of religion. They are *perfected* in the second sense, when these ministers reclaim the exorbitances of the disorderly and wicked, and, by judicious rebukes, affectionate warnings, and due application of the censures and comforts

^p See Epistle for the first Sunday after Epiphany.
Sundays after Epiphany.

^t καταρτισμός ἡ καταρτίσις.

Mark i. 19. ^u Gal. vi. 1.

^d Rom. ix. 22.

^r Eph. iv. 16.

^u 2 Cor. xiii. 9, 11.

^v Heb. xi. 3.

^q Epistles for the second and third

^s See Epistle for St. Thomas's day.

^x 1 Thess. iii. 10.

^y Matt. iv. 21;

^z Heb. x. 5.

^a 2 Tim. iii. 17.

intrusted in their hands, restore penitents, and so retrieve the beauty and strength by healing the breaches made in this body. They are *perfected* in the last sense, when those rulers and teachers keep every member to its proper station; and by example, instruction, discipline, and every possible method, propagate and preserve unity and order. So rendering the several members, like one body, animated by the same soul. In which sense also this apostle himself uses the word, when *beseeching* the Corinthians *by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ*, that they would all *speak the same thing*, that there might be *no divisions among them, but that they would be perfectly joined together* (the very original word we are speaking of) *in the same mind, and in the same judgment*.*

Next, as to *edifying*. The proper signification of it is *building*. And thus we find it very frequently in the New Testament: sometimes applied to houses, which indeed is its strictest and most literal sense; and sometimes to structures of other kinds. Examples the reader may find, if he please to consult the texts noted in the margin†. In all which the same Greek word, elsewhere rendered *edifying*, is read in its most natural construction, *building*.

From hence it comes to be applied metaphorically to the church of Christ, and those Christians that compose it. The significance of which application deserves our particular regard, as well for the frequency of its use as for the great authorities that have warranted it to us.

When our Lord himself promised to constitute and perpetuate a body of men that should always be distinguished by the confession of a true faith in him, he calls it *building his church upon a rock*‡. Of the same body collective St. Paul says that they are *rooted and built up in Christ*§; that they *are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone*¶; that they are *a building fitly framed together, growing unto an holy temple in the Lord*‡; and that *in him they are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit*¹. And St. Peter yet more particularly (after having termed Christ, with allusion to the prophecies of David and Isaiah, *a living stone, disallowed indeed of men, but chosen of God, and precious*) says, they who *come to him* (that is, his proselytes and disciples) *are, as so many lively stones, built up a spiritual house*™.

Now if every Christian, considered singly, be compared to a *stone*, and if all Christians, collectively taken, be a *house*, the first thing to be observed is that mutual joining which thus frames them together. And here the analogy holds between material buildings and this spiritual one. For a heap of stones are the same in substance though not in form, before and after they are modelled by the workman's skill. That which denominates them afterwards a house is, first, the being raised upon and regulated by one common foundation; and secondly, the being orderly placed and compacted to each other by some common cement or band of union. The foundation of this spi-

* 1 Cor. i. 10. † Matt. vii. 24; xxi. 33, 42; xxiv. 1; Mark xiii. 1, 2; Luke xii. 18; xiv. 28, 30; xvii. 28; Acts iv. 11. ‡ Matt. xvi. 18. § Coloss. ii. 7. ¹ Eph. ii. 20.
‡ Ver. 21. ¹ Ver. 22. ™ 1 Pet. ii. 4, 5.

ritual house is *faith*. Accordingly St. Paul speaks of *godly edifying in faith*^o; and to being *rooted and built up in Christ*, adds, being *stablished in the faith as they had been taught*^p. And St. Jude exhorts the brethren to *build themselves up in* (or as it might more properly be rendered, *upon*) *their most holy faith*^r. Upon this, as the groundwork of all the rest, the firmness and uniformity of the whole structure does chiefly and essentially depend. Concerning which, and the importance of it, my reader will be better satisfied with a reference to what was said on another occasion^q, than with an unnecessary enlargement or repetition here.

That other part, now to be treated of, which answers to the common cement of a building, is *love*, or charity. A term sometimes of latitude so great as extends to the whole practical duty of a Christian; but more particularly meant of amity and order, mutual good understanding, and kind inclinations and offices from one to another. This therefore, at the fourth verse, is called *the bond of peace*, as the agreement in principles is *the unity of the Spirit*. And each is then kept, when, as stones in a structure produce beauty and strength, while the lower support those above, the upper couch close upon those below, and those in the same course are laid firm and true, every one fitting its own place, and knitting with those about it; so each private Christian, whether superior, equal, or inferior, performs the duties of his own station, and so assists others in their part of the burden, as to add to the symmetry and firmness of the building. In short, when each seeks his own in the general good, and, all separate interests apart, considers himself as a piece of the common frame, whose entire union and order it is no less his advantage than his duty by all proper methods to preserve and promote. And that such is the true notion of *edifying* in Scripture will appear from a short view of some of the principal passages where the word is used.

Those texts, which apply this metaphor to the church, or body of Christ, in common, are too plain to admit of any dispute: such as style it *God's building, a building fitly framed together*^r; such as mention *the edifying of the body*, and that *body edifying of itself in love*^s, and the like. The only difficulty lies in those other places, where the word is made choice of for directing particular Christians in the discharge of their respective offices, and where regard is had to their improvement in some special graces and virtues wherein we should all labour to excel. Now, in the proof of the point I am upon, it shall be my endeavour to shew, that even in all these places there is a constant regard had to the unity and common good of the church, the benefit of our brethren, and the preventing any breaches and divisions of Christians from one another.

Nothing can be plainer than that this is St. Paul's intent in the fourteenth and fifteenth chapters to the Romans. Among whom some had been converted to Christianity from Judaism, and others from Gentilism. The former sort still kept to some distinctions of days and meats prescribed by the Levitical law; and these were censured by

^o 1 Tim. i. 4.

^p Coloss. ii. 7.

^r Jude 20.

^q See Epistle for St. Thomas's day.

^s 1 Cor. iii. 9.

^t Eph. ii. 21; iv. 12, 16.

the latter as weak and superstitious. The latter understood and asserted their Christian liberty; and these were despised by the former as licentious and profane. This matter was carried so high that they scrupled communicating together in the public offices of religion. Now, to bring both upon better terms, the apostle exposes the sin of judging others, urges the reasonableness of suffering every one to abound in his own sense, and the fitness of making allowances to our brethren in matters perfectly indifferent, (as those are, which, neither in the nature of the thing, nor by any law of God or our superiors as to the use of them, are determined this or that way;) and then, after having proved the subjects in debate to be of this kind, he adds, *Let us follow after the things which make for peace, and things wherewith one may edify another*¹: and again, *We that are strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak, and not to please ourselves*² (by rigorously insisting upon having each his own sentiments complied with in such cases); but, *Let every one of us please his neighbour for his good to edification*³. And what the peace and edification spoken of was intended to bring men to, by such mutual condescensions, the apostle's prayer just after sufficiently declares in these words, *Now the God of patience and consolation grant you to be like-minded one toward another according to Christ Jesus: that ye may with one mind and one mouth glorify God*⁴, &c. That is, that there may be no breach of charity or communion among you; but that your love and order may be testified by mutual condescensions, and continuing to join together in the acts of religious worship.

The church of Corinth fell under a like inconvenience by the positiveness of some who, bearing themselves out by a maxim, that things which have no being can have no effect or influence, took the freedom to eat of meats sacrificed to idols, to the great scandal of their less nice and distinguishing brethren. St. Paul who allows their reasoning as to their own particular, yet utterly disapproves the practice grounded upon it⁵. Because in matters of such tempor, the peace of the church, the satisfaction of our fellow-Christians, and the common good, ought to restrain our practice in the use, whatever our judgment be concerning the true state of our Christian liberty. And therefore he tells them, *All things are lawful for me, but all things are not expedient: all things are lawful for me, but all things edify not*⁶. Expedience therefore is the just abridgment of our liberty in things lawful; and edification is the just measure of expedience. Which he afterwards explains by *no man seeking his own, but every man another's wealth, by doing all to the glory of God, by giving none offence, by pleasing all men in all things, and not seeking his own profit, but the profit of many, that they may be saved*⁷.

To the same church many false teachers had crept in, who divided their hearers into sects, named after those by whose ministry they had been converted and taught⁸: and these endeavoured to bring the apostle's person and doctrine into contempt. Finding some reproofs in his First Epistle ineffectual, he threatens these separatists in his

¹ Rom. xiv. 19.² Ch. xv. 1.³ Ver. 2.⁴ Ver. 5, 6.⁵ 1 Cor. viii.⁶ 1 Cor. x. 23.⁷ Ver. 24, 31, 32, 33.⁸ 1 Cor. i. 12; iii. &c.

Second with the censures of the church^d; which he very significantly styles an *authority given him by the Lord for the Corinthians' edification, and not for their destruction*^c. Those punishments (that is) are designed to preserve the peace and unity of Christ's church, by casting them out who corrupt and divide, and, instead of building, pull down, and (as much as in them lies) tear to pieces this spiritual house, by setting up new sects and parties among Christians.

To the same purposes of order and peace, and adherence to their regular pastors, the context plainly proves the same word to be directed in the First Epistle to the Thessalonians^f: (especially if that passage be compared with two others, almost parallel to it, in that to the Hebrews 5:) *Comfort (or exhort) yourselves together, and edify one another—And we beseech you, brethren, to know them which labour among you, and are over you in the Lord, and admonish you; and to esteem them very highly in love for their work's sake. And be at peace among yourselves. Now we exhort you, brethren, warn them that are unruly, comfort the feeble-minded, support the weak, be patient toward all men.*

Once more: that this word imports all those things by which Christians can contribute to the quickening and heartening their fellow-Christians in their duty, all that may render their minds easy and satisfied, courageous and resolute under it, I think we may argue by parity of reason from that expression, 1 Cor. viii. 10; where, speaking of the mischiefs that might come to the less knowing by the ill example of eating idol-sacrifices, the apostle argues thus: *If any man see thee, which hast knowledge, sit at meat in the idol's temple, shall not the conscience of him that is weak be emboldened* (so we read, but the Greek literally rendered is, *be edified*) *to eat those things which are offered to idols?*

These are, if not all, yet at least the principal texts where the word is designed to regulate the behaviour of Christians towards their fellow-members. Some few besides there be which more immediately respect personal improvements in particular graces and virtues. But a very short view will prove, that even in these also the thing chiefly aimed at is the peace and general good of this mystical body in common.

The virtues this expression is applied to (besides those of love and condescension, union and order, already spoken to) are but two or three.

The first of these is faith. Which we have in St. Jude, when exhorting men to *build themselves up on their most holy faith*^h. Of which passage it is observable that the advice is given to the whole community of the disciples, to whom that Epistle was writtenⁱ; that the phrase is not necessarily confined to each man's care of his own, but to the mutual assistances extending to the increase of one another's faith: but especially if we consider the immediate occasion of this counsel, and the ill practices to which it stands opposed, the consequence is evident, that unity and agreement is no less recommended than soundness and full assurance in believing. For thus the context runs: *These* (the filthy heretics, disorderly murmurers, and profane mockers, mentioned just before), *these be they who separate themselves, sensual, having*

^d 1 Cor. x. ^e Ver. 8. ^f 1 Thess. v. 11—14. ^g Heb. x. 25. ^h Ver. 20. ⁱ 1 Thess. v. 11.

not the Spirit; but ye, beloved, building up (or edifying) yourselves in your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Ghost, keep yourselves in the love of God^k, &c. or (as that phrase may import) in godly charity and concord^l; which alone can secure to us the continuance of the Divine favour, and is a necessary evidence of our loving God.

Another excellence is that of knowledge. And this seems chiefly to be concerned in St. Paul's discourse at the fourteenth of his First Epistle to the Corinthians. There, treating of the spiritual gifts then frequently bestowed, he prefers that of prophecy before the speaking in unknown tongues: because *he that prophesied in a language intelligible spoke to men to edification*; but by *speaking with tongues*, except they were interpreted, the church could not possibly receive edifying^m. That is, their understandings could not be informed, nor any pious affections excited, by words the meaning whereof they knew not. I add the raising of pious affections here, by reason of that passage at the fourth verse, *He that speaketh in an unknown tongue edifieth himself*: which will very well fit this construction, but not that of informing others. But still the raising those affections seems plainly to suppose the tongue then spoken in *not unknown* to the person speaking, though it were unknown to them that heard. For sure it is altogether unaccountable, how either speaker or hearer should, in any sense or manner whatsoever, be *edified* by words not understood either by speaker or hearer. The apostle's command therefore upon this matter is, that all spiritual gifts should be used in such manner as might render them of most general profit; which is expressed by exhorting *them who were zealous of spiritual gifts to seek that they might excel to the edifying of the churchⁿ*. The same is manifestly the sense of verse 17, and at the twenty-sixth verse he advises that in their public assemblies all the parts of Divine worship might be so ordered that nothing should be done there for ostentation of any man's particular gifts; but all contrived for uniformity and decency, and the profit of the whole congregation. *How is it then, brethren? says he, when ye come together, every one of you hath a psalm, hath a doctrine, hath a tongue, hath a revelation, hath an interpretation. Let all things be done to edifying.*

I observe farther, that knowledge itself, though one sort of edification, is yet allowed by St. Paul to be so only then when it disposes men to peace and love and the common good. Take it apart from these, and you see it represented as a qualification, not only not desirable, but very mischievous. This evidently follows from that antithesis in the eighth of this Epistle, *Knowledge* (when they who have it abound in their own sense, and scandalize their weaker brethren) *puffeth up, but charity edifieth^o*.

Once more, this notion is confirmed by that rule for common conversation laid down Eph. iv. 29, that our discourse should be *good to the use of edifying*. The Greek, in terms more expressive, reads it, *for the edification of use*. And the apostle's meaning seems to be, that we should always so comport ourselves in company, as not only to entertain and render ourselves agreeable to our friends, but even to

^k Jude 19, 20, 21.^l 1 John iii. 17. iv. 20.^m Ver. 3, 5.ⁿ Ver. 12.^o Ver. 1.

render them practically wiser and better by what they shall hear come from us.

I hope the reader will not think me too tedious, at least not useless, in adjusting the notion of *edification*, as it is set forth to us in Scripture; since from thence the following inferences appear very naturally to be drawn:

1. That although every thing which hath a tendency to good may in a larger sense be said to *edify*, yet a man is not properly and truly *edified*, either by any new light or knowledge acquired, or by any pious affections and desires kindled or cherished in him, unless these prove and exert themselves in the acts of practical and profitable virtues.

2. That in order to render even the practice of such virtues strictly *edifying*, it is requisite that the benefit resulting from thence be not confined to the doer's private advantage; but that it aim at the good of others; especially the general good of religion, and of Christians considered as one house built up together in the faith and love of Christ. Whereof each, as a *living stone*, is a part; and ought to demean himself in all points as may become one possessed with and mindful of that persuasion.

3. That advancing the peace, order, and unity of this common body is, in Scripture language, the true Christian edification. Consequently all that tends to make any breach or division in that body is contrary to and destructive of edification: consequently again, separating from a regularly established church, or leaving one's proper pastor, on pretence of edifying more elsewhere, is not only wicked, but absurd. As absurd as to say, we intend to strengthen a wall by drawing out the stones; or that we design the improvement of health, vigour, and beauty, in the body natural, by unnecessarily taking away the useful limbs, and loosing the ligaments that should compact and keep them in their functions.

4. By the apostle's urging this edification of the body in *faith* and *love*, as the great end of that ministry established by Christ and continued to the church, both ministers and people are moved to make such reflections as these: the ministers, and all who undertake to execute that office, that they are highly accountable, if by their means any heresies or schisms get ground; if they do not faithfully warn the people against these things; detect the artifices of them who lie in wait to deceive; expose the error, the sinfulness, the infinite both private and public danger of those vile latitudinarian principles, which would not only break down the walls, but undermine and root up the very foundation of this spiritual building. In short, if they do not set forth the wickedness of all needless and wilful, and the misery of all judicial and deserved, separations from the church of Christ; with all the aggravating circumstances so warmly, so frequently inculcated in Scripture. There being in truth no one sin more expressly forbidden, more severely threatened, or represented as more fatal and damnable, than those of division and heresy; nor any duty more plainly taught, more authoritatively commanded, more earnestly recommended, or more zealously prayed for, than those of unity and peace and love in all the fellow-members of this spiritual body.

But if the teachers shall either touch this matter too tenderly, or explain it too superficially, the hearers, in the next place, may from the passage now before us learn both the importance and the nature of their duty in this particular. The importance indeed is so evident, that few go about to deny it. But the nature of it should be more attended to than generally it seems to have been. At present I will suggest a short remark or two for the better understanding of it:

1. From the connexion of this great house, the church universal, in the several apartments of it, (if I may so speak,) which are churches national, and so in every subdivision downwards; it appears plainly to me, that where the foundation is held, and no sinful terms of communion imposed, every single person promotes or obstructs the edification of the body of Christ, as he holds or breaks communion with that particular church and pastor to which he regularly belongs. It being thus only, and by the like gradual progressions, (beginning from the union of single persons under their respective guides, and rising from particular congregations to districts of larger extent and denomination,) that we come at last to the union of each part with the whole body of Christians diffused all the world over, and are able to shew, that he who is regularly joined to the one is in virtue thereof joined to the other also.

2. From St. Paul's resembling the church to a human body, the manner as well as the consequence of maintaining its union is likewise easy to be discerned. As, that this must be done by every little vessel (to which every private Christian bears proportion) doing its proper office in that part where nature hath placed it. And whatever disorder or mischief would follow in the one case from any dislocation or defect of such vessel, the like deformity and confusion will as certainly ensue in the other case, as oft as any member of the body shall either perversely depart from his station where Providence hath placed him, or slothfully neglect the duties peculiar to it.

3. This I take to be yet farther confirmed by that *love* mentioned here as the main instrument of *edification*. For though there be such passages as confine this word to the relief of our brethren in want and distress, I take it oftentimes to concern more immediately the fellowship and friendly communion of Christians, expressed by joining together in and receiving one another to the ordinances and public offices of religion. Some instances of this kind I set down in the margin, and a diligent observer, I believe, will find many more. Which, when their particular occasions and contexts are duly weighed, will shew this to be the first and most obvious intent of the word; and that the other kind offices and dispositions in the affairs of human life are sometimes its more remote meaning, and such as result from the former as their natural cause and foundation. At least, when Christians are considered as one body, or religious society, all other love is imperfect, and indeed hardly to be in so good a degree kept up, without this.

I only add, that there is one remarkable difference to the advantage of the spiritual body above the natural and artificial bodies whereto we

See 1 Cor. viii. 1; xiv. 1; 2 Cor. ii. 8; Phil. ii. 2; Coloss. ii. 2; Heb. x. 24.

find it compared. The natural have their fixed proportions and maturity; the artificial their set dimensions, which they cannot nor are ever designed to exceed. But the spiritual is not at any time so bounded that it should be capable of no further improvements. And this is a noble spur to our diligence and zeal, that our faith and love will always edify and always increase this body; make it more strong, more beautiful, more glorious, and enlarge as well as adorn it. Let us therefore labour, indefatigably labour for ourselves; and let us incessantly pray for all estates of men in God's holy church, that every member of the same in his vocation and ministry may truly and godly serve him^a. That they may not be, like children, carried away with every blast of vain doctrine, but so established by his grace in the truth of Christ's holy gospel, as to hold the faith in unity of spirit, in the bond of peace, and in righteousness of life. Amen^r.

THE GOSPEL. St. John xv. 1.

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| <p>1 <i>I am the true vine, and my Father is the husbandman.</i></p> <p>2 <i>Every branch in me that beareth not fruit he taketh away: and every branch that beareth fruit, he purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit.</i></p> <p>3 <i>Now ye are clean through the word which I have spoken unto you.</i></p> <p>4 <i>Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me.</i></p> <p>5 <i>I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing.</i></p> <p>6 <i>If a man abide not in me, he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered; and men gather them, and cast them into the fire, and they are burned.</i></p> <p>7 <i>If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you.</i></p> | <p>1. The union between me and you (my church) may be represented by a vine: the place and uses whereof I answer more fully than any natural vine can ever do: and my Father is the owner, that takes care of the plant, and receives the fruits.</p> <p>2. His care is seen in cutting away the unprofitable and cultivating the fruitful branches, to render them still more so.</p> <p>3. This care you have partook of by the instructions I have given you.</p> <p>4, 5. Let it now be your own care to preserve and improve this union, by living up to your faith and knowledge: which is the only course to be fruitful, because the communication of my Spirit and grace will depend upon it. With which you may do great things, but without it, nothing. No more than a branch severed from and having no sap imparted by the vine can bring forth grapes.</p> <p>6. Besides, such separation will prove not only unfruitful, but fatal. For a wicked believer, like a vine-branch that bears not, is unprofitable, and destined to the fire, (i. e. utter destruction.)</p> <p>7—10. Whereas on the other hand, the being fruitful in this respect shall en-</p> |
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^a See Collect for Good Friday.

^r Collect for St. Mark. General Intercession.

8 *Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit; so shall ye be my disciples.*

9 *As the Father hath loved me, so have I loved you: continue ye in my love.*

10 *If ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love; even as I have kept my Father's commandments, and abide in his love.*

11 *These things have I spoken unto you, that my joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full.*

any difficulties in your duty; and to soften the grief for my absence by inward comforts resulting from this spiritual union that is between us.

gage a gracious return to all your prayers; promote my Father's honour, by raising the credit of religion; and prove you my disciples indeed, by the imitation of my zeal and obedience: which shall also be followed by the like beneficial returns from me as mine is from my Father.

11. These considerations I leave with you, for the support of your spirits under

the support of your spirits under any difficulties in your duty; and to soften the grief for my absence by inward comforts resulting from this spiritual union that is between us.

COMMENT.

THE tender Jesus, designing probably to comfort his apostles under the terrible apprehensions of his departure from them, begins this chapter with an account of such an union between him and his disciples as should abundantly compensate the want of his personal presence and conversation. The intimacy, the beneficial effects of this union; the duty, the manner, the necessity of preserving it; and the irreparable miseries of a separation, are all most elegantly and significantly set forth by the parabolical representation of a vine and its branches, the illustrating whereof in some useful measure shall be the business of this discourse.

1. The intimacy of this union is abundantly plain, from the choice of a tree and its branches as a fit emblem to represent it. For the clearer understanding whereof, and of the peculiar elegance and propriety in this similitude, two things should be attended to. The one, that from the rest of the trees a vine is singled out. Any of them would well enough have signified the closeness, but some other effects of and considerations relating to this are much more emphatically shewn in a vine than any common tree. Those interpreters no doubt have judged very rightly who applaud the wisdom of this choice upon the account of the many vineyards in that country: from whence our Saviour frequently raises parables, because every part of such comparisons could not but be rendered intelligible to his hearers; and they who constantly dealt in the allusion might more easily apply and discern the intent of matter and expressions so familiar to them.

But there seems to have been a yet greater inducement to this choice from the very nature of the thing itself; in regard of the vine bearing a fruit more generous, and bearing in greater abundance. This renders it (as our Lord in the passage here takes notice) more worthy the tiller's care. And yet (which is greatly to the purpose of this parable too) that noble, that delicious plant, so highly valued when prosperous, is yet, when barren, more vile and refuse than any other tree.

But then it must be observed in the next place, that when our Lord speaks of himself as this vine, (as in the first verse,) we are to understand Christ taken in the complex sense for him and his church, root and branches, (as elsewhere in Scripture head and body*) together. But when (in the following verses) the tree is distinguished into its parts, then Christ is the root and trunk, and Christians are the branches, of a piece with, shooting out of, nourished by, and living with, in, and through him.

The other heads relating to this matter will appear in their best light, by considering and explaining our Lord's allegorical representation of it in the order St. John hath recorded it: by which method several beauties of the parable will show themselves, not so easy to be preserved if the whole be taken asunder, and cast into distinct topics of discourse.

The first proof of the importance and benefit of this union is the great care which the husbandman, or owner of this vine, esteems the preservation and improvement of it worth. A care extended to every single branch in such manner as each are capable of, and as the common good of the whole may best be served and promoted by.

To this purpose he is said to *take away* the barren and to *purge the bearing branches*, ver. 2. By entering into covenant with God at baptism, we are grafted into the body of Christ's church, and become branches of this spiritual vine. And in proportion as we afterwards continue in or swerve and fall off from the holy purposes of faith and obedience then contracted for, we are esteemed to bear or not to bear fruit. So that by the work of the cultivator here mentioned are represented the different dispensations of the Divine wisdom and goodness, suited to the several circumstances of particular believers, and to the honour and advantage of the Christian religion in general.

Thus it is often seen that Almighty God does by some signal judgments bring down or quite cut off wicked and powerful oppressors, that *hold the truth in unrighteousness*, crush the righteous, corrupt the principles and discourage the practice of piety and virtue. The prosperity and insolence of such renders their condition like, and therefore requires that their fate too should be like, that of wild and luxuriant suckers; necessary to be taken away because they impoverish the tree, and keep the fatness of the root from others, while they continue an useless burden to it themselves.

On the other hand, the hopeful vigorous shoots are cherished and encouraged. These the Master of the vineyard digs about and dunga, or prunes or trims, to advance their fertility yet more. That is, God instructs, strengthens, favours, comforts, remarkably prospers; or, if that be needful, he afflicts, corrects, tries, and distinguishes well-disposed people, that they may grow and shine in knowledge and goodness and all spiritual graces. In short, he spares no proper pains, denies no fitting opportunities for the promotion of that holiness which is the main end aimed at by the ministry of his word, by the assistances of his grace, and by the various methods of a providence

which never fails to make all things work together for the good of them that love and fear God¹.

Next follows an earnest exhortation to perseverance, grounded upon sundry arguments illustrating this union². As, first, the necessity of a steadfast adherence to Christ, in order to the preservation of our spiritual life. Because the whole substance and efficient cause of this is as necessarily derived from him as the fruitfulness of the branches depends upon the root. They, if the communications from hence be intercepted, are insignificant and useless; we, upon losing the like kindly influences from the mystical vine, fall under an universal impotence, and have no longer the least ability to do good.

The advantages of this union, when faithfully preserved, are next represented. And this is preserved by *abiding in Christ*³. An expression intended no doubt to denote the continuance of our serious resolutions and sincere endeavours of that obedience stipulated for when we were first incorporated with him. The profit of this is set forth by a vast increase capable of being produced in virtue of those plentiful and perpetual communications to which our conjunction with the root gives a title, and which the root never fails to supply in their proper seasons and measures. These are the assistances of Divine grace, in which the very spirit and life of Christians as such consists. It is this that excites, that improves, that maintains our holiness. Nature is insufficient; for that is diseased and decayed. Reason is too weak to conquer our prejudices and passions. The best disposition cannot bear up against corrupt habits and violent temptations. A principle above all these is requisite to repair our breaches, to enlighten and purify our minds, to persuade as well as convince, to incline, to guide, and to determine our wills. Natural actions are performed by a natural concurrence, and such cooperations of God as are common to all his creatures. But *that which is spirit must be born of the Spirit*, and gospel virtues cannot spring from any other original than gospel grace. The most exalted goodness is a more liberal gift, but the lowest degree of it is also a gift. They who pass for persons of larger abilities and attainments are indeed distinguished from the vulgar. But what distinguished them? Not any inherent power or natural excellencies of their own; but the free distributions of that Lord who intrusted them with more of his talents. Let therefore the increase be never so great, this ought to mortify our vanity, that the fund we traffic upon is another's. For whatever may be allowed us in other capacities, yet, when considered as branches, we bear not the root, but the root us: and whence our very vital principle, the source of all our vigour and activity, is drawn, no words can more peremptorily declare than these of our Lord, who urges the necessity of the mutual abiding, by good purposes on ours and by the distributions of grace on his part, from this unanswerable argument, *that without him we can do nothing*.

Meanwhile, these frequent commands of *abiding in Christ*, after the manner I have explained, and the promises of reward to them that do so, suggest to us one remarkable difference between the natural

¹ Rom. viii. 28.² John xv. 4.³ Ver. 5.

and the mystical vine. It is that the former is merely passive in all its productions, the other not so. And therefore, though the barrenness of the natural branches be a misfortune only, yet that of the spiritual is strictly a crime. Hence we are called upon to *cleanses ourselves from all filthiness both of flesh and spirit*^a; exhorted *not to receive the grace of God in vain*^b; forbidden to *resist*, to *quench*, to *grieve his Holy Spirit*^c; commanded to *work out our own salvation with fear and trembling*, upon the encouragement that such labour shall not be in vain, because it is *God that worketh in us both to will and to do of his good pleasure*^d. In short, the ability to act is from God, but the act is from ourselves when so enabled. When God had set *David's heart at liberty*, he then resolved and ran *the way of his commandments*^e. When Christ had strengthened St. Paul, he could then *do all things*^f. Without that enlargement from the slavery of lusts and vicious habits, David could not have taken one step in God's way. Without that strength, St. Paul could not have performed any one of all the things he spoke of. David could not enlarge his own heart; neither could the apostle strengthen himself: but it was the act, and therefore the virtue, of the one to *run when thus set free*; and of the other, to *do all he was so enabled for*. And indeed, were it otherwise, all the commands and promises, all prohibitions and threatenings, (of which there are very many,) relating to this matter, are mockery and vanity. For why are they persuaded who cannot comply? or commanded, who cannot obey? or threatened, who cannot rebel? or called upon to work together with God, if they can do nothing when he assists? Though what they do, it is confessed, they could not do without his gracious prevention and assistance.

In another respect indeed these two vines do but too well agree. So far, I mean, as the barren parts of each are concerned. The branches cut off from most other trees are of substance and service; but those of the vine men set no value upon: they are trodden under foot with contempt, and the fire is the end of them. Thus Christians in the parallel, who profit not under the influences of grace, are the worst and most deplorable part of mankind. The lowd and scandalous professors of this best religion fall from the most glorious advantages into the most abandoned state of any; and leave themselves no more possibility of any middle condition than nature hath allowed the tree whereto they are here resembled. It is either the most noble or the most despicable plant of all the vegetable world: Christians are likewise of the moral world the most generous or the most unprofitable part; objects that best deserve esteem and admiration, or else most justly provoke indignation and scorn and reproach.

But this is not all. For if some be (as, alas! too many are) so lost to modesty and shame, as to have quite outgrown all regard to the opinion of men; yet let those hardened wretches understand that there is still behind an affliction which will be felt awaiting their unfruitfulness. The vine, as it contributes not to its own barrenness, so neither does it feel the disgrace and the curse of it. But these

^f 2 Cor. vii. 1.

^z Ch. vi. 1.

^a Eph. iv. 30.

^b Phil. ii. 12, 13.

^c Psalm cxix. 32.

^d Phil. iv. 13.

spiritual branches choose and affect their own barrenness; and therefore the effect of this to them is a punishment strictly so called, in which they can be no more unconcerned than they were in the obstinate disobedience that deserved it. A dreadful and irreversible sentence of final extermination from heaven and happiness; everlasting flames kindled by the breath of an angry God, and the insupportable agonies of a never-dying worm gnawing their guilty breasts perpetually, with the bitterest remorse and self-condemnation. Upon this account our blessed Lord resumes his former argument, shewing that the misery of separation from him, and of unfruitfulness under his communications, do not determine in merely being unprofitable; but that they expose men to the utmost extremities of suffering. For such, he tells us, are *cast forth and withered*^d; they are rejected by God, and, by withdrawing of the grace they had abused, lose the vital principle of their souls. And not only so, but they are *gathered and burned*, fitted up for destruction, snatched away in fury, and thrown into hell.

On the contrary, the advantages of improvement under the grace and gospel of Christ are also to ourselves. And many encouraging motives are urged to quicken us in it. This Spirit is said to be *the pledge of our adoption*, the instrument of our *sanctification*^e, *the seal of our inheritance and redemption*^f: *the Spirit which in our hearts cries, Abba, Father*^g; by which *we have access to God*^h, which *helps our infirmities*ⁱ when we approach him, and is an assurance that *let us ask what we will, it shall be done unto us*. These last are our Saviour's own words here. Confined indeed by some interpreters to the apostles as a promise of full power to work all such miracles as they should find necessary, and apply to their Lord for his assistance in, whereby unbelievers might be convinced, and his truth get credit in the world. But as the union, and the grace consequent upon it, do evidently extend to every Christian, every branch of this mystical vine; so does the promise of the reward here extend no doubt to all who abide in that union by a diligent and humble use of that grace. And therefore I will very briefly shew how valuable a privilege this is, and how it is really made good to every sincere disciple of Jesus Christ.

To those who at all reflect upon the present state of human nature, to what unspeakable variety of weaknesses and wants we stand exposed, and how perfectly unable the best and greatest among us are to succour the one or to supply the other; what can be more desirable than access with ease and confidence to Him whose help we always stand in need of, and who is always mighty to help? to Him, from whose single hand all the relief we are capable of does and must come? And what can be a more powerful incitement to please and serve Him faithfully than to be satisfied that this will effectually recommend us to his favour, open his ear to our requests, and so far prevent our at any time addressing in vain, that in all things seasonable and convenient for us, even our own hearts cannot be more liberal in wishing, than God will approve himself in giving?

^d Ver. 6.^e Rom. viii. 13, 15.^f Eph. i. 13. iv. 30.^g Gal. iv. 6.^h Eph. ii. 18.ⁱ Rom. viii. 26.

Now this is every good man's happiness. Such have in effect whatsoever they ask; because such always ask in an humble and dutiful submission to the will of their heavenly Father. For in all prayer there is a general reserve to be implied and understood, how express and particular soever the form and words of the petition may be. This is what not only should be, in point of deference and duty, to a Being of infinite wisdom; but it is and must be so in the very reason of the thing. For when our prayers specify any object by name, this proceeds from a present apprehension of that object being proper for and good to us. In which notion, the moment we were made sensible of a mistake, that object would cease to excite our desires, and we should deprecate instead of asking it. Hence then it follows that there must be, in the very nature of prayer rationally put up, a tacit referring of ourselves to Him, whom we cannot but acknowledge to understand the condition of our affairs, and the consequences of granting what we ask, much better than ourselves do. It is the virtue then, it is the wisdom, nay, it is the necessary and constant meaning of every one who prays according to knowledge, to insert, mentally and intentionally at least, this clause into all his supplications, that *God would so fulfil the desires of his servant as may be most expedient for him*. And thus our Saviour's promise here is most true, *Ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you*^k. For such disciples as he speaks of here have no peremptory and determinate will of their own; but such only as, though disposed to some objects rather than others, agreeably to the present measure of their understandings, is yet always subordinate and resigned to the wiser and better will of Him from whom they ask.

The other advantages of fruitfulness that follow are, the honour of God and religion, the justifying their own character and sincerity to the world, and the return of Christ's love, continued and exemplified in all the instances of kindness which resemble that of God to his only begotten Son. Some, confining this passage, as was intimated before, by the great quantity of fruit expected here, understand the prodigious number of converts and the glorious successes of the Christian faith which those apostles so zealously laboured after; and that our Lord's intention was at that time to excite and inflame their zeal, from a consideration how greatly the propagation and establishment of the gospel would redound to his and his Father's honour, and how well it would become them who professed to retain to him as their Master. For by *being his disciples*, at the eighth verse, cannot be meant their now becoming such: such they already were, and had been for a long time. But the true intent of that expression is, that this was the way to appear and manifest themselves as such. A phrase of much like importance with that in the thirteenth of this Gospel; where it is said of mutual love, *By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples*^l. As charity there, so fruitfulness here, is recommended for a distinguishing mark and sure indication to whom they belong.

But, as I said, since not they only, but we and all Christians are branches of this vine, and since bearing will be required from every branch, it will behove us to examine what fruit it is which this rela-

^k John xv. 7.^l Ver. 35.

tion to Christ is fitted to produce, and upon the product whereof all the hopes and happiness of them who have the honour to be so related depend.

When our blessed Saviour directs us to judge of the tree by its fruit, his meaning is, that the consequences visible, whether in the opinions or actions of men, will naturally be of the same piece and kind with the principles from whence they are drawn. Now the Spirit and grace of God, (the ordinary influences whereof are imparted to Christians as such for the general conduct of their lives,) being that very vital principle which renders the branches of this mystical Vine capable of bearing; the ready way of learning what it is expected we should bear is to inquire what those dispositions and actions are, which the Scripture hath taken notice of as effects most genuine and peculiar to the operations of this Divine Spirit in the hearts of men.

Now in this matter it is very easy to inform ourselves. For St. Paul acquaints us that *the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance*^m. And again, *The fruit of the Spirit is in all goodness and righteousness and truth*ⁿ. To the same purpose St. Peter exhorts men^o, that, *giving all diligence, they would add to their faith virtue; and to virtue knowledge; and to knowledge temperance; and to temperance patience; and to patience godliness; and to godliness brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness charity*. All which he enforces with this argument, most exactly apposite to the subject I am upon—*For if these things be in you and abound, they make you that ye shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ*. In like manner we read of *having our fruit unto holiness*^p, of *bearing fruit unto God*^q, of *being fruitful in every good work*^r, of *being filled with the fruits of righteousness*^s, of *the wisdom from above*, (which is but another name for the grace now in treating of,) *full of mercy and good fruits*^t; and a multitude of other passages there are much to the same importance.

These are the virtues that shone so bright in the mind and conversation of our blessed Lord; the root in whom the fulness of this Spirit dwelt. These therefore are the product which must prove every professor of his doctrine to be a genuine and living branch of his mystical vine. And therefore men need not go far for satisfaction in this point, nor puzzle themselves with dark and intricate questions about the signs of their union with Christ, since these are so easily discernible, and the only true marks of it. All which indeed is sufficiently intimated to us by those words at the tenth verse—*If ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love, even as I have kept my Father's commandments, and abide in his love*.

But in regard the commandments of God extend to all the circumstances and conditions of men; and those moral virtues, mentioned by St. Paul just now as the genuine fruits of the Spirit, are of such different sorts as not possibly to be put in practice at one and the same time; therefore, in order to our bearing much fruit, it suffices that we

^m Gal. v. 22, 23.ⁿ Eph. v. 9.^o 2 Pet. i. 5—8.^p Rom. vi. 22.^q Rom. vii. 4.^r Coloss. i. 10.^s Phil. i. 11.^t James iii. 17.

be habitually disposed to all, but that we actually be exercised in such of them only as the present occasion requires. And in the choice of these our different relations and capacities, our different fortunes and events in the world must determine us. For as that branch is fruitful which bears in proportion to the advantages of its place and situation, though not the richest fruit of the whole tree; so is that disciple esteemed to bear much fruit who makes it his constant care to do all that good which the abilities and opportunities afforded him by God render him capable of. Indeed it is here as in the parable of the sower; which, although some brought forth a hundred, and other sixty, yet allows that which brought forth but thirty to be good ground. In one word, here is no room for discouragement or complaint, no tolerable pretence for sloth or despondency. The vine communicates its sap and fatness to every branch; and, though all do not partake of this in equal measure, yet each is answerable for such increase as may answer to the quantity received. Be then our station high or low; be our attainments slender or large; whoever he be that discharges the several duties of that post in which Providence has placed him; whoever improves the degrees of grace afforded him to the best of his skill and power; this man *abides in the vine*, and does not only bear, but *bear much fruit*.

I shall make a brief reflection or two, and so conclude.

1. My reader will readily observe the agreement between the Epistle and Gospel for this day. Which, though representing it under different images, do both agree in describing the union betwixt Christ and Christians. Both tend to illustrate the advantages of it; both earnestly excite our utmost diligence to preserve it. With this only difference, that St. Paul insists upon the benefits accruing from thence to the body in general; but our Lord regards those chiefly which belong to each member in particular. From both together we may form an unanswerable argument for the keeping that unity and promoting that edification, which if neglected and broken is certain, not only to disturb the peace of the church, but by cutting off, in the end to destroy, those very persons who are guilty of making the breach. For it is by grace only that men can be saved. That grace is nowhere promised to be given in an extraordinary way. It is first bestowed in and ordinarily annexed to the use of the sacraments, the ministry of the word, and other Christian ordinances, called for that reason *means of grace*. What therefore can become of those branches who are severed from all communication with the trunk? And how careful ought every one to be neither to break himself off wilfully, nor by any unworthy and scandalous behaviour to incur a forfeiture of those kindly influences; nor by a profane abuse or supine neglect of those religious offices appointed to convey them, to draw down the fate of those sapless boughs, whose present curse is withering and decay, and whose end is to be burned!

2. I would call upon my reader to take notice how pious and prudent, and exactly agreeable to our Lord's declaration, that *without him we can do nothing*, our excellent established Liturgy is. In this we daily acknowledge that *all holy desires and all good counsels*

and all just works proceed from God^a. In this, after the most exalted act of worship, we pray to be presented with his most gracious favour, and furthered with his continual help; that in all our works begun, continued, and ended in him, we may glorify his holy name, and finally by his mercy obtain everlasting life^x. The acknowledgments of this kind are frequent and full. No church ever took more care to declare her sense of the vanity and danger of relying upon our own sufficiency; none magnifies the freedom, none urges the necessity of Divine grace more industriously; none begs it with more humility and pathetic zeal; and they who pray in dependence of our Saviour's promise to hear those that abide in him, cannot implore his assistance more suitably than in some of the Collects noted in the margin^y; that particularly for the ninth Sunday after Trinity. With which (it comes so close up to the scripture now in hand) I will finish this discourse:

Grant to us, Lord, we beseech thee, the spirit to think and do always such things as be rightful; that we, who cannot do any thing that is good without thee, may by thee be enabled to live according to thy will; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

ST. PHILIP AND ST. JAMES'S DAY.

A short Account of St. Philip.

THE first of St. John's Gospel informs us that Philip was of Bethsaida; that he was called by our Saviour the day after Andrew and Peter; and was the instrument of bringing Nathanael first to Jesus. It does not appear by what authority Clemens of Alexandria^a makes him the person who, when called by our Lord, desired leave to go home first and bury his father. Which occasioned that reply — *Follow me, and let the dead bury their dead^b*. Our Lord, to try his faith, proposed to him the difficulty of feeding the multitudes in the wilderness^c. To him the Greeks, who desired to see Jesus at the feast, made their first address^d. And with him our Lord had the discourse of shewing his disciples the Father, explained in the paraphrase of the Gospel for this day.

He is said to have preached in the upper Asia, to have wrought many miracles in Hierapolis, a city of Phrygia (now Aleppo), and there to have suffered martyrdom by being fastened to a cross, and stoned to death^e. He was a married man, and had three daughters. Two whereof died virgins at Hierapolis: the third died at Ephesus, and appears from a passage in Clemens Alexandr. to have been married^f. These were persons inspired by the Holy Ghost, and are

^a Second Collect for Evening Service. ^x Prayer in the end of the Communion Service.
^y Advent Sunday 1, 4; Epiphany 1, 4; Lent 1, 2; Easter-day; Sunday 2, 3, 4, 5; Trinity Sunday 1, 7, 11, 12, 14, 17, 18, 19, 25. ^a Strom. iii. p. 436. ^b Matt. viii. 21, 22.
^c John vi. 5, 6, 7. ^d John xii. 20, 21. ^e Chrysom. in 12 Apost. ^f Euseb. Hist. lib. v. c. 24. Clem. Alex. Strom. iii. p. 448. Dr. Cave from Epirhan. Heres. 26.

reckoned among the lights of the Asiatic churches. We know not of any writings he left behind him, though the Gnostics are said to have alleged some such in defence of their heresy.

A short Account of St. James the Less.

He was the son of Alpheus or Cleopas, brother to Jude, and the brother (according to the use of that word among the Jews, which extends it to all near relations), or cousin-german of our Lord. Distinguished from the other James, Zebedee's son, by the title of James the Less; and known also by the title of James the Just. This last denomination seems to have been given him on account of his extraordinary sanctity^g. Which was such that he is said to have the privilege of entering at pleasure into the holy place; and, for an evidence of his piety and perseverance in prayer, his knees are said by constant kneeling to have been hardened like to camels' hoofs^h. The year after our Lord's passion he was by the apostles made bishop of Jerusalem: as such he presided in the debates concerning circumcision, Acts xv, and is styled by St. Paul one of the pillarsⁱ, and named before Peter and John.

He wrote the Epistle that goes under his name as a check, most probably, to the errors of some converted Jews; who laid the whole stress of Christianity upon faith and an outward profession of the truth; and lessened the regard due to good works and a truly Christian conversation.

The occasion and manner of his death is related with the following circumstances. The governing part of the Jews, enraged at the disappointment of their malice against St. Paul by his appeal to Cæsar, revenged it upon St. James^k. The death of Festus gave them an opportunity of acting in this matter more arbitrarily than otherwise they durst have done^l. In the interval therefore between that and the arrival of the successor Albinus, Ananus the high priest summoned St. James, and required him to renounce the Christian faith^m. For the compelling him to do this in the most public manner, he was carried up to the battlements of the temple, and threatened to be cast down in case of refusal. He, on the contrary, with greater vehemence confessed and exhorted to the faith of Christ, in the presence of those who met to hear his renunciation of him. Provoked by such inflexible constancy, they threw him headlong down. The fall broke his legs, yet he prayed: the rabble below received him with showers of stones; and at last one with a club, used by fullers in dressing their cloths, gave him a blow on the head, after which he presently expired. A fact, condemned even by their own historianⁿ, and said by him to be so by all persons that bore any regard to justice or the laws. In-somuch, that for this offence against both, the high priest, by whose authority it was committed, was in a few months degraded, and another put in his stead.

^g Matt. x. 3. xxvii. 46; John xix. 25; see Pearson on the Creed, Art. iii.; Gal. i. 19; Euseb. Hist. lib. ii. c. 1; Hieron. in Catal.

^h See Pearson's Lect. iv. in Act. Apost.

ⁱ Gal. ii. 9. ^k Acts xxvi. ^l Hieron. Catal.

^m Euseb. Hist. l. ii. c. 23. ⁿ Joseph.

Antiq. l. xx. c. 8.

THE COLLECT.

O ALMIGHTY GOD, whom truly to know is everlasting life; Grant us perfectly to know thy Son Jesus Christ to be the way, the truth, and the life; that, following the steps of thy holy apostles, Saint Philip and Saint James, we may steadfastly walk in the way that leadeth to eternal life; through the same thy Son Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen°.

THE EPISTLE. St. James i. 1.

1 *James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, to the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad, greeting.* 1. James, bishop of Jerusalem, the metropolis of the Jews, to all of that nation, wheresoever dispersed, who are converted to the Christian faith, wishes health and prosperity.

2 *My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations; especially which God sends for the sake of your virtue and constancy:* 2. Be not discouraged, but rejoice at afflictions, those which God sends for the sake of your religion, and to prove your virtue and constancy:

3 *Knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience.* 3. And that for this very good reason, because such trials exercise your patience.

4 *But let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing.* 4. A virtue which, if improved to its just height, will contribute greatly to your Christian perfection.

5 *If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him.* 5. If any therefore want wisdom to manage these trials aright, let him pray for it to God, who is always ready to grant it.

6 *But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering. For he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed.* 6, 7. But these prayers must be made with a full persuasion of God's power and goodness, and firm resolutions of doing our own duty: otherwise they will not be successful.

7 *For let not that man think that he shall receive any thing of the Lord.* 8. And a man divided in his own thoughts will never stick close to any thing.

8 *A double minded man is unstable in all his ways.* 9. Let the Christian in mean circumstances think

9 *Let the brother of low degree rejoice in that he is exalted:* his poverty abundantly compensated by the opportunities this furnishes for the advancement of his faith and virtue.

10 *But the rich, in that he is made low:* 10, 11. Let him also who

because as the flower of the grass he shall pass away.

11 *For the sun is no sooner risen with a burning heat, but it withereth the grass, and the flower thereof falleth, and the grace of the fashion of it perisheth: so also shall the rich man fade away in his ways.*

12 *Blessed is the man that endureth temptation: for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love him.*

ous and eternal reward, which God, who engaged to bestow on them who, by continuing faithful in his service, prove that they love and value nothing in comparison of him and his favour.

is fallen from a wealthy and prosperous condition he well pleased with that change, which gives him a title to solid and substantial blessings, instead of that worldly prosperity, than which nothing can be more fading and inconstant.

12. Happy therefore is that man who perseveres in his integrity; because he shall not fail of that glorious

and eternal reward, which God, who cannot break his word, hath engaged to bestow on them who, by continuing faithful in his service, prove that they love and value nothing in comparison of him and his favour.

COMMENT.

THE condition of the Jews had for several ages before our blessed Saviour's coming into the world been very distressed. Indeed, ever since the carrying away of the ten tribes by Salmaneser, and the captivity of Babylon, which followed shortly after under Nebuchadnezzar^r, great numbers of them had been scattered abroad in foreign countries; and were not only deprived of the opportunities to settle and embody themselves as formerly in their own land, but found very unkind treatment from the nations among which they sojourned. The case in this respect was not at all mended, but indeed made worse, to those of them whom the irresistible evidences of truth had brought in to the acknowledgment and obedience of the Christian faith. Such had now not only the malice of the heathens among whom they lived to encounter, but the yet more implacable envy and rage of the far greater part of their own countrymen, who still continued in obstinacy and unbelief. The contempt and prejudices of the former, and the blind and bitter zeal of the latter, had extinguished all humanity, and instigated them to persecutions, in which cruelty was even reputed a virtue.

Under such circumstances, these persons were most proper to be addressed to by the apostle of this day. For he was himself not only descended of the same stock, but made choice of by the other apostles to preside over the first Christian church collected in their ancient capital city Jerusalem. And when nature and character, and the tenderness of a charity resulting from both, had determined him to the persons, their present sufferings pointed out the subject proper above all others to begin his good counsel with. He therefore immediately falls upon those sufferings which the feeling of them to whom he wrote would naturally make uppermost in their thoughts. He endeavours, first of all, to instruct them in the ends, the advantages, and the proper management of afflictions. Those more especially which God thinks fit to bring men under upon the account of truth and religion.

Now because these are spoken to at large, and all comprehended under the title of temptations, it may, I conceive, be both seasonable and useful to take an occasion from hence of saying somewhat concerning the nature of temptations in general.

To *tempt*, in the full extent of the word, is to *try*. And, by analogy, whatever is a trial of our virtue may be called a temptation. In this most comprehensive signification we may say that every circumstance, every event of human life, is a temptation. Because there is not any one of these but, according as it falls under the principle of free choice natural to mankind, is capable of being used to right or abused to wrong purposes; and so of becoming the occasion of our doing well or ill in the management of it.

But in regard some of these require less skill and resolution to manage them than others; and since the use proper to be made of them is so agreeable to our reason and inclination, that they can hardly deserve to be called trials; therefore that name is generally confined to such as carry apparent danger and difficulty in them. Such as offer violence to flesh and blood, and create great struggles between the affections of nature and the principles of religion. Hence it comes to pass that great afflictions, of any kind whatsoever, and especially the sufferings undergone for the sake of God and a good conscience, are peculiarly distinguished by the title of temptations.

In all these cases the Scripture acknowledges temptations to come from God. Thus he is said to tempt Abraham, when commanding him to sacrifice Isaac: the conflict which must naturally rise between the natural affection to a son, the son of his old age, his only son, the son of promise; and the consideration of his obedience due to that command, being the most difficult experiment of faith in and love to God that perhaps was ever made. And consequently, the virtue of complying with it, in despite of so much suggested for declining it, is the noblest instance to be met with in story. Thus again, the temptations of affliction and suffering in a good cause are frequently attributed to God in Scripture; even when most violent, and such as the weakness of human nature is aptest to startle at and to shrink back from. This is plainly the meaning of several passages which do not only mention God's trying men and their hearts, but intimate the severe manner of doing it by comparing the afflictions themselves to fire, and the persons enduring them to metals passing through and separated from their dross in that fire. Hence they are said to be *tried*^a, to be *refined*, to be *melted as silver and gold*^b; and with regard to persecutions upon the account of religion in particular, the trial of Christians is said to be *much more precious than that of silver and gold, which perisheth, though it be tried by fire*^c; and such sufferings are called a *fiery trial*^d, or, according to the more literal rendering, *a fire kindled for their temptation*. Now as God is said expressly to be the Author of all these temptations, so he ordains them for very wise and kind reasons: of which I shall have occasion to take notice in the sequel of this discourse.

There is another sort of temptation in the same sense of trying, by

^a Psalm lvi. 10.

^b Zech. xiii. 9. Ezek. xxii. 20, 22.

^c 1 Pet. i. 7.

^d Ch. iv. 12.

which men are said to tempt God, when they adventure upon dangerous experiments of his power and goodness. Such as import either a wicked distrust of or unwarrantable presumings upon his protection and care, or some other of his Divine perfections. So the Israelites tempted God in the wilderness, when questioning his ability to supply their wants^a; and so our Saviour was urged to cast himself down from a pinnacle of the temple^x, in reliance upon a promise of the angels bearing him up. The fallacy of which reasoning he refuted by that plain command in the law, *Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God*^z. Thus the Pharisees and lawyers frequently tempted Christ by demanding signs which they thought above his power; and by asking ensnaring questions which they supposed would gravel him^z. And thus Ananias and Sapphira are said to have tempted the Spirit of the Lord^a, by lying to St. Peter, in a confidence that their fraud would pass upon the apostles, and that the Holy Ghost, wherewith they were inspired, could not be conscious of or discover their secret collusion. But this is an application of the word no way belonging to the place in hand.

Another more restrained sense of it there is, which imports seducing men into sin. Thus the devil is most emphatically styled *the tempter*, as always lying in wait, and industriously suggesting evil thoughts. Either drawing us from good purposes, or egging us on and emboldening us in wicked ones^b.

This sort of temptation is also ascribed to the corrupt inclinations of our own hearts. Particularly in this chapter: for here the apostle declares that it cannot without the utmost injustice and impiety be ascribed to God, in that remarkable text, ver. 13, 14, *Let no man, when he is tempted, say, I am tempted of God; for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man: but every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed.*

The truth is, in all seducement the tempter plays our own artillery upon us. For man, in his primitive purity, was made capable of standing or falling, by a limited understanding possible to be imposed upon, and by a liberty of will to choose, according to the true or false appearances of good. But by the corruption which, since the fall, mankind lie under, these faculties are miserably weakened. The understanding is clouded, the will warped, and that concupiscence which signifies a strong propension to sensuality and wickedness is become a fit matter for the subtle enemy of souls to work upon. By these all the evil motions excited in us find the mind disposed to receive and indulge them; and all the deluding representations put upon the things of the world and the appetites of nature are now much more apt to deceive us into a wrong choice, and draw us off from the true principles of right reason and duty. When therefore a man is tempted by his own lust, he is also tempted of the devil; and when tempted of the devil, he is tempted of his own lust. Because the corruption of our nature, meant by that word, is the instrument the devil makes use of; and it is our present unhappiness to have a false party within, which holds correspondence with the enemy, and furnishes those very

^a Psalm lxxvii. 18; Numb. xi. 4; Exod. xvii. 4.

^x Matt. iv. 5, 6.

^y Ver. 7.

^z Matt. xvi. 1. xix. 3. xxii. 35; John viii. 6.

^a Acts v. 9.

^b 1 Thess. iii. 5; 1 Cor. vii. 5.

arms that he labours to slay us by. For were it not for the depravity of our sensual appetites and passions within, we should find it much more easy to form right judgments and make wise choices of things. And were it not for the malice and cunning of our spiritual adversary without, who takes advantage of these disorders and frailties of lapsed human nature, the affections of our own breasts, and the appointments of Providence concerning us, which in the design of them are temptations of experiment only, would not, as now they so often do, prove temptations of seducement in the issue and unhappy event of them.

Thus much, one would hope, might suffice to shew how men are said in Scripture to be tempted of God; and how of the devil, and their own treacherous naughty hearts. What those temptations are that deserve our joy and thanks; and what those which it is our duty with our utmost might to strive and pray against. But as we daily imitate our first parents in their transgression, so do we in their contrivances to cloak and excuse it too. Adam endeavoured to mitigate his guilt by alleging that a woman given by God enticed him to it^c. His sinful and no less blasphemous posterity argue after the same manner; and can by no means think the command of this apostle reasonable, but endeavour to *hide* their iniquity, as Adam, by making God a party in it too^d. A flaming, but it is much to be suspected a common impiety; frequent in the private imaginations of many, who yet have the modesty not to espouse and openly avow it. But some have done even this, and produced what they esteem their strong reasons. Which I cannot but think it may be useful, first, to propose, and then to offer such considerations in return to them as may detect the vanity of this shift, and prevent the wickedness of running to a shelter which, instead of a covering, will prove our utter confusion.

Now upon this occasion some have had the confidence to argue as follows: that, as to our weakness and corruption, God knows it perfectly; and how far we are from being an equal match for the enemy that attacks us. God declares in Scripture that he hates sin, that he tempts no man to sin, that he willet^h not the death of a sinner. But does he not suffer man to be tempted? Nay, does he not ordain the very temptations, that is to say, those very things and events which become occasions of sin to them? And is not this to will their death, and to destroy his sheep, when he does not only not destroy the wolf, but permits the sheep to come daily and hourly in the wolf's way? In a word, if God do indeed hate sin, why (say they) does he not prevent it effectually by cutting off at once all those occasions from whence sin comes?

These are pretences, sometimes laid hold on to silence the reproaches of a guilty conscience, and assuage the terrible expectations of the wrath to come: at other times insultingly advanced as objections against the Divine Providence in general; or at least as difficulties that bear very hard upon the justice and holiness and goodness of that Being who is said to govern the world in methods of a wisdom tempered with and inseparable from all these perfections.

Now in answer hereunto it is to be observed, that the objectors

^c Gen. iii. 12.

^d Job xxxi. 33.

agree with us in one general principle. Which is, that it cannot by any means consist with the notions we ought to entertain of God, to suppose that a Being perfectly good should lead men into inevitable ruin; or that a Being perfectly holy should be author of or partaker in the sins of men; or that a Being perfectly just should punish men for facts by himself ordained, and, without any seeking or concurrence of their own, necessarily brought upon them. Thus much being premised as out of the question, let us see how much the following particulars will avail towards satisfying all reasonable scruples about this matter.

1. First then, let it be considered whether, when the several beings in the universe are created in excellent order, and a gradual ascent of perfections, it can misbecome their Maker to continue them in that order. Now the wisdom of the Creator seems chiefly to be manifested by the peculiar excellencies of the several sorts of creatures: and the standing beauty of the creation is illustrated by each sort acting in consent and proportion to their respective powers and qualifications. Among all the stations in those regular distances, none seems more wonderful than that assigned to man. He stands upon the confines, and is the common centre of union, as it were, between the material and spiritual world. Here is a soul inhabiting a body corruptible; consequently fit to be acted upon by passions and appetites; and since tainted with original sin, whereby it is greatly depressed toward flesh and sense. But that primitive constitution and this supervening corruption notwithstanding, a rational soul it is; and as such endued with a power of thinking, comparing, judging, and determining its own choice accordingly. We cannot say indeed, that in these operations the human soul is so clear, or so equally poised, as formerly. But that even the present remains of this freedom are an excellence, cannot be denied. For liberty is a privilege which all the world are fond of, and perpetually contending for. And those men know very little of the dignity of human nature who do not allow that of the will to be the most valuable liberty of any. Consequently, it can be no reflection upon God to preserve men in this liberty, or to suffer the laying such objects before them as in their present station they may make an unwise choice of; for this is the condition of a creature frail and fallible, as well as free. But free his will is, so as to be the proper internal principle of all his actions. And if that freedom be (as, alas! it is) too often employed amiss; he who gave the privilege ought not to be reproached for the abuse of it. Least of all, when not only every actual abuse of it, but every habit or disposition in us tending that way, and all the unhappy consequences of both, are owing to man himself. On the other hand, if these bends and warpings of the will had destroyed all freedom in us, what trifling, what mockery are those scriptures which expostulate with men, and ask, *Why they will die?* which call upon them to *turn themselves from their iniquities*^c; which declare wicked people to be *destroyed by the perverseness of their own folly*^d; and lastly, which bespeak men in such solemn manner, *I call heaven and earth to record this day against you, that I have set before you*

^c Ezek. xviii. 30, 31.

^d Prov. xi. 3. 1. 31, 32.

life and death, blessing and cursing; therefore choose life, that both thou and thy seed may live!

2. The last particular vindicated the *faculty* of the will; let us in this look to the *objects* of it. Which indeed are such, that they who are desirous to have an effectual end put to all vice, by God not suffering men to be tempted, seem not to be sufficiently aware that the same method would be every whit as effectual for putting an end to all virtue too. For to denominate any thing virtuous, it is necessary not only that there be a contrary evil, but also that the evil have something in it which may invite us under the appearance of some good. Now that appearance is the mover of our affections, and the very thing which makes the temptation. For it is our unhappiness and our fault to be drawn by the bias of appetite and sense: and through rashness, or prejudice, or weakness in balancing of motives; we suffer the delusion of false appearances to prevail, and prefer real evil, disguised, before real good. Now the stronger those motives to sin are which we resist, and the more resolutely we persevere in that resistance, the greater is our virtue and our reward. And if there were no motives to be resisted, then doing well would not entitle us to virtue or reward either. If this be so, then our present temptations, by furnishing opportunities for the exercise of our virtue, do plainly add both to our present commendation and our future happiness. Nay, and in proportion as the temptation is sharper and more difficult to be endured, the more valuable is the victory, and the more joyful the triumph. And because the exposing ourselves, and all that is dear to us, is a trial that flesh and blood is of all others most apt to boggle and recoil at, the apostle does here represent the case of suffering for Christ and his religion as such a one. And, not content with patiently enduring, he commands his afflicted countrymen even to rejoice in such trying circumstances^b; upon account of that glorious and beneficial distinction which unshaken courage and constancy would make for them here, and the abundant recompense that would be thus secured to them hereafter.

3. But, thirdly, as oft as the subject now under debate comes in to our minds, let us be sure to take this along with us, that the objects without, the solicitations from within, and the suggestions of our great enemy working upon both, when considered all together, are yet *but* temptations. That is, they try us only, but they cannot so force us as that any man should perish without his own consent. In a word, temptations are not properly the causes, but merely the occasions and instruments of sin. And even then, they are not such by any natural tendency of their own; but altogether made such by our neglect or mismanagement. Can any thing be plainer than this is made by the different effects and consequences of the dispensations of Providence, as they happen to be the portion of different men? The afflictions sent by God, do not they aggravate the guilt of some by provoking impatience and rage, murmuring and despair? And yet the very same afflictions brighten the virtue of others; and by the exercise of patience and meekness, faith and heavenly-mindedness,

draw their souls closer, and render them dearer to God. The riches God bestows, are they not to one man, like *the camel to the needle's eye*, an obstruction to his entrance into the kingdom of heaven? And yet even these promote the salvation of others, who *make to themselves friends of the mammon of unrighteousness*, and open a more abundant passage into *everlasting habitations*¹. These are cases obvious to every man's senses and experience. And reason will prove it as evidently, in all the kinds and degrees of them, that temptations do nothing of themselves: that the result and issue depends constantly upon the person tried by them: and that such issue will be prejudicial or profitable, not according to the quality or the degree of the trial, but according to the hand it shall fall into, and the uses that shall be made of it.

4. I would not be supposed all this while to forget the deplorable impotence of human nature; and that unhappy bent of passion and inclination which, like a bias put the wrong way, draws us much more strongly to evil than good. But, blessed be God, we can add, in the last place, that there is a provision made for this also, by the assistances of that grace which is promised to all our weaknesses and wants, upon condition it be earnestly sought and diligently improved. So that when he who says, *Without me ye can do nothing*^k, hath likewise said, *Ask, and ye shall receive*^l—and, *Him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out*^m—and, *To him that hath shall be given, and he shall have abundance*ⁿ—and, *My grace is sufficient for thee, for my strength is made perfect in weakness*^o—and, *I will never leave thee nor forsake thee*^p; when the same apostle, who acknowledges that he was not *sufficient of himself so much as to think a good thought*^q, does yet at another time declare himself *able to do even all things through Christ who strengthens him*^r; and lays this down as a rule that obtains in all God's proceedings, and as an evidence of the *faithfulness* from which he can never depart, that he *will not suffer his servants to be tempted above that they are able, but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that they may be able to bear it*^s: when such scriptures as these, I say, come to be fairly weighed, they are great and gracious supports. Enough to buoy up the sinking spirits of any true Christian under the severest trials: enough to convince any impartial considerer that God, who gave men a power of choice, is wise and good in leaving them to the use of it; that he who makes temptations capable of contributing to their virtue and happiness, no less than to their guilt and misery, is by no means chargeable with their sins: and that he who forsakes not the faithful, nor ever fails to sustain the weak, does all that can become him to do with creatures, so created at first, and so corrupted at present, as mankind are. Creatures, not supposed to have sufficient powers of their own, and therefore directed here by St. James, upon a certain presumption of their wants, from whence and upon what terms to expect supplies. For that is manifestly his meaning from the fourth to the ninth verse. Which I shall explain as briefly as I can, by inquiring into the nature of the thing he commands his afflicted brethren to pray for; and

¹ Luke xvi. 9.^k John xv. 5.^l Matt. vii. 7.^m John vi. 37.ⁿ Matt. xxv. 29.^o 2 Cor. xii. 9.^p Heb. xiii. 5.^q 2 Cor. iii. 5.^r Phil. iv. 13.^s 1 Cor. x. 13.

then into the qualification he requires for rendering those prayers successful.

The blessing to be prayed for is *wisdom*. Under which we may reasonably suppose all that ability of doing well to be comprehended which is more commonly styled *the grace or Spirit of God*. For in regard the will and understanding are only distinct operations of one and the same mind; and whatsoever the understanding conceives and represents as best, the will never fails to choose; it follows that a true information of the judgment is not only an effectual security, but even a necessary cause of a right determination of the will. Provided always that by such information be meant, not only a cold and speculative notion of the truth and nature of things, but a lively sense and just calculation of their importance and respective consequences to us. For as no man in his wits ever chose evil, except under the notion of good; so neither did any ever choose it, except under the notion of a good, greater, as is at that instant presumed, than some other good then laid in the balance against it.

The motives or several sorts of good concerned in moral actions are reducible to three heads; the virtue or honesty, the profit, and the pleasure of them. The more of these concur, the stronger is the inducement. But the first is of so great consideration, that both the other are not an equivalent, nor ought to prevail, without, much less against it: that is, no prospect of pleasure or advantage will justify an action vicious and infamous. Now in regard those advantages and pleasures are also of different kinds, it requires great skill and integrity to make a just computation and choice between them; to give a due preference, as the profit happens to be greater or less, present or future, and as the pleasure proposed is durable and fugitive, intellectual or sensual. In the present depraved state of human nature, the last of these motives seems most powerfully to affect us. And of them again, such pleasures as most gratify sense, and cannot be of any long continuance. The only method therefore of securing ourselves from the danger of being deluded by these is to weigh against them the virtue, the advantage, and the delights of another kind, which attend things unacceptable to flesh and blood. But this being all a violence to our corrupt inclinations, we must be obliged to a principle superior to nature for our success in attempting it. Especially in afflictions, which the apostle truly confesses to *seem for the present not joyous, but grievous*[†]. And more particularly yet, in those which are voluntary afflictions, and chosen for the sake of God and religion (the case of the converts here applied to by St. James), no wisdom less than that from above can produce and establish resolutions and perseverance in sufferings, to which mankind have the strongest and most irreconcilable aversions. This therefore is the mercy which they and all afflicted Christians are encouraged to ask of God. And the mighty influence and benefit of it, under such trying circumstances, may be expected to answer our purposes and wants the several ways that follow:

1. In enlightening the minds of men to see and attend to the many

[†] Heb. xii. 11.

excellent reasons which move God to ordain or permit such afflictions upon his servants. Such are, the trial of their virtue, as the best tempered arms are proved by a higher charge than ordinary; the increase of their spiritual strength, exercise contributing to that of the mind, no less than that of the body; the prevention of spiritual pride and security, by such experiments of their own weakness, if left to themselves; and of their still remaining liable to temptation, notwithstanding any attainments in grace and virtue made by them, though never so happily; the correcting some past misdemeanour, or subduing some rebellious lusts, which oftentimes make insurrection, and interrupt the piety even of very good men; magnifying the power of Divine grace in carrying them through difficulties which human nature, destitute of such assistances, had not been able to bear up against: shewing to the world examples of surprising patience, resolution, and firmness of mind, to provoke their imitation, and encourage the honest but feeble intentions of others; weaning the affections from things here below, raising the mind by heavenly dispositions, and, in proportion to their present sufferings, reserving a sure and more abundant recompense for the crown of their labours at the last great day.

These are some of the many excellent ends served by the sufferings of good men. Which yet are all overlooked or forgotten, unless represented faithfully to the mind by a wisdom inspired from above. To this we owe the very remembrance, to this the just valuation of them. This teaches us the reasonableness of glorifying God in any way of his own choosing, the preference due to profit above pleasure, and how much better it is for us that our minds should be improved than that our senses should be gratified. This takes off from the present smart by the feeling of God's favour; and more than makes amends for bodily pain and grief by the ravishing satisfactions of a good conscience. But especially this sets the excellency of our reward always in view, and the unspeakable kindness of that Father, by whose infinitely wise Providence *the light affliction of a moment* is so ordered as to *work out a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory*^u.

2. The wisdom mentioned here is yet further useful, by discovering to us the ends aimed at in our own particular afflictions, and the means best fitted for attaining those ends. The former observation propounded only the ends of affliction in general; which are served, not all at once, but some in one time and person, some in another, as circumstances differ and occasions require. In this variety therefore of good uses, it is of the utmost importance rightly to understand which should be chiefly applied, and what sort of account God expects from each dispensation of his Providence toward our own selves. In this disquisition the state of our souls and the nature and kind of our affliction are principal articles. These when the grace of God hath helped us to desery (as, whether our sufferings be designed for correction of some vice, or whether for the exercise and exemplification of some virtue, and the like), the next proof of our spiritual skill must be seen in such a temper and behaviour as may answer

that purpose of God concerning us. If this be to chastise us, repentance must be our care; if to try us, patience and perseverance; if to promote the honour of religion, meekness and charity to our persecutors; and a deportment so discreet, and void of offence, as may oblige those of a contrary judgment to glorify God by the good works they shall behold in us. In short, this will be a light to our eyes and a guide to our feet. A wisdom to salvation, by which we shall at once be enabled to know and to practise our duty; to bring forth the fruits of righteousness, and to bear each fruit in its proper kind and season. Particularly in sufferings for the sake of religion, (which is the case before us, and seems the most difficult of any,) this heavenly wisdom is absolutely necessary to distinguish the causes and proper times of suffering. What those are which require our enduring and resisting even unto blood, and when the serpent ought to be mixed with the dove, by prudently declining a needless trial. What means are fit to be used for our own preservation, which if neglected, our pretended martyrdom would be the sacrifice of fools: and when we are to cast ourselves entirely upon Providence, and esteem the very sorest temptations just matter of joy to us.

Such is the grace which St. James here would have his persecuted brethren, and indeed the afflicted in general, to ask of God. And so properly is it styled *wisdom*; as a principle both convincing their judgments of the wise and kind ends, and conducting them in the use of means most suitable to the ends, of their respective trials. It remains now only that I say somewhat to the other point, which concerns the qualification requisite to render the prayers for this wisdom successful: and that shall be done very briefly.

Among the promises of grace produced at the entrance upon this head, the first enjoins *asking*, as a necessary preliminary to *receiving*. Now this *asking* the apostle tells us here must be *in faith*, without *doubting* and *wavering* and a *double mind*. Whereby there is no question but the two following particulars are intended:

1. First, a steadfast reliance upon God for obtaining such succour and relief, that is, such measures of his grace and favour, as he sees expedient for us. It is plain from infinite passages of holy writ, that God expects we should apply to him in our wants, and that with repeated and continued earnestness. But then it is equally plain, to any who consider those passages, that our importunity is acceptable and prevalent with God, as it is a testimony of our unshaken faith in and humble dependence upon him; in a word, that it does not extort the mercy he is loath to grant, but make us fit to receive the blessings he delights liberally to bestow. Accordingly, where the deliverances of his servants and the granting of their prayers are mentioned, we find them generally attributed to their *hope* and *trust*, their *waiting for*, and *casting their burden upon God*. For this indeed is giving the glory due to his divine perfections*. We must not imagine any difficulties too great for him to vanquish; for that detracts from his omnipotence: we must not suppose our own faults and frailties (when unaffected and repented of) will shut his ears against our cries; for that were a

* Psalm xxxii. 10. xxxiii. 20, 21. lv. 22; Isaiah xvi. 3, 4.

disparagement to his mercy and his truth. Least of all must we come to him with any confidence in ourselves; for that were to make our prayers a mockery, and presume to divide the honour of our success with him. And whatever our own endeavours may be, (and they ought to be what they can,) yet the events, nay, the very power of endeavouring, must be acknowledged entirely his. To be short, he is to be our sole stay and trust; and upon him we are to rest with a firmness that may compose our fears, prevent all anxiety of thought, set us above all despondencies, possess us with an impregnable persuasion of his affection for us. Such, lastly, as may represent the aids we implore, with a due resignation of our spirits to his heavenly will and wisdom, (all that we really stand in need of,) to be as certain to us as if we already had them in actual possession.

2. The other thing intended here is steadiness in our duty. A well weighed and fixed resolution, that no extremities shall drive us to despair, nor abate of our love and zeal. A prudent use of the means put into our hands, without which we do not so properly trust God as tempt him. And an utter abhorrence of all unlawful means for our ease and rescue. For by recourse to such we plainly break off with God, take the matter out of his hands, give up his protection, and formally discharge his Providence from any farther care of us. To this purpose a very ancient writer of the church interprets *the double mind* here of a man divided in his affections between this and the next world; floating like a vessel without ballast, with wind and tide contrary. Such is the instability spoken of at the eighth verse, where conscience of duty, fear of punishment, and hope of heaven draw one way, and a violent gust of trouble and worldly considerations drive another. And according as either of these opposite motives make a stronger or weaker impression, the man's piety and virtue are proportionably more intense or remiss. Now such a man cannot, as St. James observes, *think* (or reasonably expect) to *receive any thing* (any of this wisdom) *from God*; because he is defective in the very condition upon which it is promised. Sincerity and constancy are our part; but these belong to none *whose hearts are not whole with God, and who continue not steadfast in his covenant*. His honour and his truth stand unalterably engaged in favour of those brave soldiers of Christ who in this fight of afflictions strive lawfully and manfully; but they have no right to either deliverance or support, who, though content to march under his banner while the service is easy, do yet, when combat comes on, and the action grows hot, throw down their arms, and desert to the enemy. The Christian is a warfare that allows of no capitulation. For as the cause is God's, so is the strength that defends it. And is it to be imagined that a formal petition should prevail for additional recruits, to them who betrayed the supplies they received before? If therefore we desire God should strengthen our weakness, we must determine to employ the courage and powers he inspires. We must, in full assurance of his might, resolve to stand it out to the last; which is indeed resolving to conquer and triumph. For *he is faithful, he cannot deny himself*; and they who call in his succours against any sort of tribulations or trials with the two dispo-

sitions I have been treating of, never yet did, never shall seek them in vain.

I own there are many cases from whence unwary people might be apt to conclude, that even such prayers are not effectually heard. But I must add, that many prayers are then most effectually heard when such men fondly suspect the quite contrary. For the minds so prepared, as we have just now seen, always esteem their addresses most successful when answered in that way which the Divine wisdom knows to be best for them. Not always by deliverance out of afflictions, because the continuance of these may be more for the glory of God and their own good. Supposing, then, that these be even lengthened; they are heard, if their own patience be lengthened out with them. Suppose the degree of them to be yet more exquisite; they are heard, if the measures of their spiritual consolation and support do at the same time increase. Nay, supposing the extremity to be such as even foils these combatants for a season; yet, notwithstanding such disgrace, they are heard, if God renew their strength, pour in more plentiful reliefs of grace, and so bring good out of evil, that they grow wise and wary by past dangers, and not only recover their standing, but even profit themselves of their fall. For it is an indispensable part of our duty cheerfully to submit to the Divine wisdom, both for the duration and degree of our trials; and firmly to depend upon it for such a final issue as shall not fail at last to be most for our advantage. And therefore, if these petitioners shall be oppressed, tormented, and barbarously slain in a good cause, yet even then they are heard too. Then, in the most beneficial sense of all; for *blessed* above all others is *the man that thus endureth temptation*, because sure to receive *the crown of life which the Lord hath promised to them that love him*. And a crown of more than common weight and lustre, no doubt, is laid up for those that give this last proof of their fidelity and love to him.

THE GOSPEL. St. John xiv. 1.

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| 1 <i>And Jesus said unto his disciples, Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me.</i> | 1. Be not discouraged at my departure, or the troubles consequent upon it; but support your hearts with faith in the Father and in me, who am one with the Father, and consequently able to defend you in the execution of my commands. |
| 2 <i>In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you.</i> | 2. Able also to reward you with durable and abundant happiness in heaven. |
| 3 <i>And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also.</i> | 3. Whither one purpose of my returning is, to gain access for you: and accordingly I will in due time come up thither, to dwell with me for ever. |
| 4 <i>And whither I go ye know, and the way ye know.</i> | 4. That this is the place to which I am going, you |

have been often told ; and so you have likewise of the way that leads thither ; so that you need not any enlargement on these points.

5 *Thomas saith unto him, Lord, we know not whither thou goest ; and how can we know the way ?*

6 *Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life : no man cometh unto the Father, but by me.*

revealed for this purpose, and so the truth ; I am the author and only source of happiness eternal, and so the life ; to the enjoyment whereof with my Father no man can attain, except by obeying and relying upon me in these several capacities.

7 *If ye had known me, ye should have known my Father also : and from henceforth ye know him, and have seen him.*

ing : for they who know me and my doctrine know him ; and they who see my miracles and me see him.

8 *Philip saith unto him, Lord, shew us the Father, and it sufficeth us.*

possibly to some manifestations which God was pleased to make of himself to Moses, Elias, and the like, desires some sensible representation of the Father.

9 *Jesus saith unto him, Have I been so long time with you, and yet hast thou not known me, Philip ? he that hath seen me hath seen the Father ; and how sayest thou then, Shew us the Father ?*

nothing more than human in the Son was not to know the Son. And to descry the Divine perfections under that veil of humanity was to see the Father in the Son :

10 *Believest thou not that I am in the Father, and the Father in me ? the words that I speak unto you I speak not of myself : but the Father that dwelleth in me, he doeth the works.*

11 *Believe me that I am in the Father, and the Father in me : or else believe me for the very works' sake.*

were the wisdom, goodness, truth of the Father, in the Son's doctrine ; and the power of the Father in the Son's miracles. The union in this latter respect being a sensible demonstration of their union in the rest.

12 *Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that believeth on me, the works that I do shall he do also ; and greater works than these shall he do ; because I go unto my Father.*

disciples so effectually, that the operations of it in their hands should be more amazing than even those of it in his own had been.

6. I am the guide and director, and so the way ; I am the teacher of the truth,

7. Do not therefore complain that you know not the Father to whom I am going :

8. Philip, conceiving grossly of this sight, and alluding

9. This request our Lord reproves by answering that the bodily sight of him had not fully acquainted Philip with him. For to discern

10. These two being one in substance, and mutually in each other, as original and image. And in this respect neither of them an object of bodily sight.

11. They are seen by the mind contemplating their Divine perfections ; such

12. As a farther evidence whereof, and that he was to be exalted, not destroyed, by dying, Christ promises to impart his power to these

13 *And whatsoever ye shall ask in my name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son.* 13. Nothing which they should attempt in the execution of their ministry with the invocation of his name and interposition of his power should be insuperable to them. By which means the Christian religion should be promoted, and so bring honour to the Father in the manner he chooses to be served and glorified.

14 *If ye shall ask any thing in my name, I will do it.* 14. And to remove all doubt of my power (says Christ) I once more promise that I will do this for you.

COMMENT.

IN the Epistle, one of our Lord's apostles directs and comforts his suffering fellow-Christians under the present feeling and smart; in the Gospel for this festival, our Lord himself comforts that and the rest of his brethren the apostles under the melancholy prospect of temptations. The arguments for their support are the same in substance, as the troubles they were to be sustained under are the same in kind. Such difficulties principally as the preaching or profession of the gospel should expose them to. But as the afflictions of good men in general are an object of the Divine mercy, and entitle the patient sufferers to the assistances of grace at present, and a glorious recompense hereafter; so are we allowed, under due limitations, to apply these promises proportionably to the pains and patience of all Christ's faithful servants, how different soever in other respects their capacities and sufferings may happen to be.

Our Lord had, in the chapter before, said, that to the place whither he was then going St. Peter could not *follow him* immediately, but he *should follow him afterwards*^a. The same comfort is here extended to the rest of the apostles; who indeed were appointed to follow him in the same way of torments and death for the truth's sake. And the terms of this consolation justify the hopes of all others who follow him in meekness and constancy, integrity and piety, though not in the like painful steps of dying for the testimony of the same truth.

The excellence of the reward provided for all such is illustrated in three particulars: (1.) The durableness of it, intimated by the word *mansions*. Places of abode; opposed to that uncertain condition of things below, represented elsewhere by our *having here no continuing city*^a. (2.) The abundance of that provision; for those mansions are *many*, and furnish room for all who make it their care to seek and to be qualified for them, be the number of such never so great. (3.) The exquisiteness of the felicity which shall be then attained. In regard these mansions are in *Christ's Father's house*, where all happiness and perfection dwells. For in God's *presence is fulness of joy, and at his right hand there are pleasures for evermore*^b.

From hence our blessed Saviour proceeds to shew that the glorious object of this hope is entirely owing to him. This discourse is occasioned by the gross apprehensions of two apostles; whose slowness of

^a Ch. xiii. 36.^a Heb. xiii. 14.^b Psalm xvi. 11.

understanding turned to our profit by opening the way to a full declaration of our Lord's essential unity with God the Father, and to express assertions of his power and readiness effectually to answer the requests put up in his name by plentiful supplies of all necessary assistances and graces of the Holy Spirit.

That this promise was literally and primarily intended and made good to the apostles by the extraordinary gifts and powers of the Holy Ghost, imparted to them at the day of Pentecost, and at other times afterwards, as their circumstances required, is not to be denied. But there are other gifts of that Spirit, and several blessings no less requisite for the ordinary conduct of our actions, for the honour of God and religion, and the leading men in all ages to the same blissful mansions. These also are such as must be sought after the same manner, and expected on prayers alike conditioned. And therefore, to render this scripture of as general use and consolation as the words of it will in their utmost latitude import, I shall consider the two last verses of the Gospel with relation to the prayers of good men at large. And, having treated formerly of sundry points wherein this subject is concerned, I will employ my reader's thoughts on one purposely reserved for the present occasion. That, I mean, which is here enjoined as a condition necessary to qualify all our prayers for success, which is, *asking in the name of Christ*.

Now a thing is said in Scripture to be done in the name of another four several ways. Either (1.) when it is done at the command of and by commission from another. Or (2.) when men act or do it for the service and honour of another. Or (3.) when they proceed in conformity to the rules and directions set by that other. Or (4.) when they interpose the authority and mediation, the sake and merits of another. In these several senses Christ is said to *come* and to *act* in his *Father's name*; the prophets, to *speak* in *God's*, and the apostles in *Christ's name*; and men to *hazard their lives*, and to *suffer reproach for his name*, and to *do wonders*; nay, to *do all things in his name*. And in the last of these significations we read of *being justified, receiving remission of sins, having life, and giving thanks to God in his name*.

1. In the first of these senses, men may be said to ask in *Christ's name* when they come to God in obedience to Christ's command, and from a sense that it is their duty so to do. So did the apostles, when, in a just diffidence of any power or holiness of their own, they implored supernatural abilities proper for the efficacious discharge of a trust by him committed to them. So David describes his own practice, and the foundation of it, Ps. xxvii. 8, *When thou saidst unto me, Seek my face, my heart said, Thy face, Lord, will I seek*. And this ought indeed to be the sense of us all at every approach toward the throne of grace. For a very little reflection upon the infinite majesty of God, and the wretched vileness of such creatures as we are, will suffice to condemn the offering at any sort of correspondence with a Deity so pure, so high, of arrogance and presumption. Some warrant therefore was necessary to countenance and justify those addresses, the

^c John v. 43. x. 25; Exod. v. 23; Deut. xviii. 19, 20; Acts iv. 1, 17. v. 41. xv. 28; 1 Pet. iv. 14; Acts v. 28, 40; Col. iii. 17; 1 Cor. vi. 11; Acts x. 43; John xx. 31; Eph. v. 20.

boldness whereof, without such encouragement, would be unseemly and inexcusable. But when our gracious Lord hath condescended, not only to allow, but with all imaginable kindness to invite, nay, with the most peremptory injunctions to require, our frequent and constant applications; when he hath called and directed us to come with all the modest assurance and dutiful importunity usual in the requests of children to a father, or of one dear and intimate friend to another; what can be alleged in extenuation of their fault who shew themselves insensible of such mercy, such a privilege? And how shall they escape who neglect to use the one and thrust the other away from them? who look upon prayer as a matter of no consequence; such as may be performed or let alone at pleasure; such as God neither needs nor will be moved by; in short, as a homage, if it be a fit one, by which no honour, no advantage accrues to the party paying, but all to the person receiving it? When irreligion and profaneness shall obtrude such notions as these, and when the too general disuse of prayer seems to say they are too greedily imbibed, it is highly requisite men should be told that duty as well as interest hath a part in this matter; that men should pray in an apprehension of their being bound to do so. And therefore they that *ask in Christ's name* must first of all acknowledge Christ's authority. They proceed, I mean, upon a principle of conscience, as performing a service and an instance of homage. A service owing from a dependent creature to an infinite and almighty Creator, and encouraged by positive commands and affectionate exhortations. These ought always to weigh very much with a disciple, when so often and so earnestly inculcated by so great, so gracious a Master. And that in so kind a manner, as well as with so just authority, that none would, none can in reason think himself at liberty to dispute or dispense with the command. Let this then be our first care, this our first mark of *asking in Christ's name*; that we pray in due deference to his order, in confidence of the encouragement given by him; and *ask*, because, as his servants and followers, we find ourselves under indispensable obligations, such as render us guilty of a very great sin should we neglect *asking*.

2. This direction of *asking in Christ's name* may be also interpreted so as to concern the ends proposed to ourselves, and to regulate our desires and our use of the things we pray for. An interpretation judged by some the most genuine of any, who have therefore chosen to read the words at ver. 13 in the following order—*Whatsoever ye shall ask in my name, that the Father may be glorified in the Son, that will I do*. This was manifestly the case more immediately concerned here. Those apostles did not ask a power of working miracles out of any vain ostentation, or for private advantage to themselves, but purely for the promotion of the gospel; which required such testimonies, and by which, above any other instance, the Father was glorified in the success of his Son's doctrine and kingdom. And St. Chrysostom in like manner understands the promise of our blessed Lord's presence *where two or three are gathered together in his name*, to mean such assemblies for promoting mutual peace and love, as make Christ the motive and true foundation of charity to their neigh-

bour. However that be as to the proper sense of that passage in particular, yet certain it is in general that every good and faithful servant makes his master's advantage the principal end of his actions. Our blessed Saviour himself, upon all occasions, vindicates his own fidelity from hence, that he was far from pursuing any separate interests of his own, but in all things sought the honour of his Father that sent him. And thus it becomes every man who professes himself a servant and follower of Christ to do; to fix his hopes and wishes chiefly upon those things which conduce most to the promoting his Master's honour, and the advancement of that spiritual kingdom of grace and glory which he came to set up; to set up in the hearts of men at present by faith and virtue, and then in the happiness and salvation of souls hereafter. We must therefore prefer this before any private or temporal respects, and fix our last and great aim in the increase of our Lord's honour. So that no Christian, in this sense, *asks in Christ's name*, who does not allow the spiritual and eternal benefits to be obtained from him that place which is really due to them. That is, who does not esteem the future infinitely more desirable than any advantages which can be enjoyed in the present world: and desire those proper to the soul above any pleasures or advantages that can possibly accrue to his outward and mortal part. Nay, who with regard to these sensible and bodily advantages does not bring a spirit so perfectly resigned, as to be well content that his prayers relating to these should be heard and answered in such a manner as God in his wisdom shall see most fit; though at the same time that may so happen as not to be most agreeable to the inclinations of flesh and sense, and a merely natural man.

3. They who *ask in Christ's name* are supposed to contribute their own endeavours, so far as these can be serviceable to the obtaining what they ask. For (as I said before) to do any thing in the name of another implies the doing it by his order and direction; and faith supposes a promise and a declaration as the proper basis on which it stands. Consequently, it does not, cannot exclude, but must indeed of necessity infer the performance of all those conditions upon which the promise is suspended. For example: we are commanded to ask *our daily bread*; but we are commanded to seek it by honest labour too. And therefore the praying for it implies no more than begging success upon our labours, and the blessing of God to prosper and reward our industry. We are encouraged to ask forgiveness of our sins, and emboldened to depend upon the mercy of God and the sufferings of Christ for it: but we are ordered likewise to repent of our sins, and forsake them. And therefore he who prays, and expects to be pardoned, and still continues obdurate and unreformed, hath no just foundation for his requests or his hopes; nor can he be said to *ask in Christ's name*, because he does not ask in such a manner and upon such terms as Christ hath appointed. *If I incline to wickedness with my heart, the Lord will not hear me*, says David^d. And therefore obstinately wicked men do not ask in Christ's name when they pray; because such a course of life is neither consistent with

^d Psalm lxxvi. 16.

true faith in him as a Mediator, nor with the conditions of being heard and accepted by virtue of that mediation. In all such cases men do but tempt God, and mock themselves; by forming new conditions exceeding their commission, and abusing the privilege of access to him. They turn that which was intended as an encouragement and assistance to their own care into a pretence of hypocrisy and sloth. We cannot command events, nor render our own endeavours successful; and therefore God hath permitted, nay, he hath enjoined the recommending ourselves and our endeavours to him. But that which is a supply to our defects and weakness, where we can go no farther, is by no means a reason for superseding all attempts, or any excuse for not going as far as we can. We cannot effect the whole, but we must not, upon that pretence, sit down with our arms folded, and gape up for extraordinary supplies at the hand of Providence while ourselves do nothing. We are directed to *cast our care upon God*, but we are nowhere encouraged to cast our idleness or our extravagancies upon him. Which yet is done when we expect that he will furnish our vanity and profuseness, or grant relief and success, without any degree of care or concern to help ourselves. This is the case both of our temporal and spiritual affairs, that neither of them will be done without us. And indeed, in the business of this world, most men of any common prudence seem well enough aware of it. The generality of people perhaps are rather too solicitous, too eagerly employed on that account. But in the weightier matters of the next, where our endeavour and concern are full as necessary, and ought at least to be equal in our thoughts and regard, they are miserably negligent and supine, and think that now and then a lazy prayer, though never seconded by their own pains, is all that needs. Hence it so often comes to pass that men complain of praying to no purpose, and charge God foolishly with not hearkening to their petitions. Whereas the failing, if duly examined, is all the while at home. And their hopes miscarry, not from any want or backwardness in him to hear or help, but from want of their own diligence, and taking proper methods for the compassing their purposes. It is not easily to be conceived how great and happy a change this consideration duly applied would make; how it would quicken and invigorate our actions; and what a world of injurious and unbecoming reflections it would prevent, which persons, loath to seem in fault themselves, are used to cast upon grace and Providence. They bemoan their infirmities or their temptations; their inability to conquer some darling passion, or to free themselves from the bondage of some reigning lust; and, lest their slips and falls should lie at their own doors, take great pains to make the world and themselves believe that they have prayed fervently and frequently, but are never the better. But such men, in truth, ought to lament and condemn themselves. And as in most cases the blame is but too manifestly ours, so, where it is not evident, it will become us to suspect and be very jealous of ourselves; rather indeed to suspect any thing than once imagine that God is wanting in his helps, or can be false to his gracious promises. For he *who asks thus in Christ's name*, that is, who

prays as he ought to pray, in this third respect it is certain never asks in vain.

4. But the principal and most proper intent of this expression is that which I reserved for the fourth and last place; approaching the throne of grace, I mean, with an humble confidence in the merits and mediation of Christ; and resting our souls upon him alone for the mercy and good acceptance of God. Thus did the apostles in the matter more immediately concerned in this passage. In the miracles wrought by them for confirmation of the truth, they constantly invoked the name of Jesus Christ. When strength and limbs were restored to the lame, they are commanded *in the name of Jesus to stand up and walk*^c: when the sick recovered their health, they declare that *Jesus Christ made them whole*^f: when evil spirits were to be dispossessed, they are commanded *in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of the patients*. The usual method of performing such cures was by laying on of hands and prayer^h. The requests put up to God for the confirmation and increase of this power entreat that *he would stretch forth his hand to heal, and that signs and wonders might be done by the name of his holy child Jesus*ⁱ. And when these petitions at any time had their effect to the amazement of all beholders, particular care was taken to prevent those effects being attributed to the apostles themselves; by solemn and public declarations that they were not owing to any *power or holiness of their own*, but must be ascribed entirely to *Jesus*^j, whom *God had glorified, and to faith in his name*^k. So constant a dependance upon Christ did the very manuer of working those miracles express, which he promises the power of and prescribes the qualification for here. And so just were the doers of them to their great Master's honour, in disclaiming all right to any glory from thence, all part in the operation, except that only of suppliants for and instruments in the use of these supernatural and truly Divine gifts.

And herein they are our patterns. For we, like them, must bring the name of Christ along with us, and, whether we desire to be *forgiven those things whereof our consciences are afraid*^l, or to receive supplies suitable to our weaknesses and our wants, must come to God in a due sense that both the one and the other sort are such things as *we are not worthy to ask, but through the merits and mediation of his Son Jesus Christ our Lord*. Accordingly, such forms as these have obtained in all ages and parts of the church. And most deservedly; since this is a manner of worship peculiar to Christians. It is an essential and distinguishing property of our religion; of absolute necessity to be observed, and consequently of very great importance to be rightly understood. To which purpose I shall now endeavour to set it in a true light, by representing, as plainly and briefly as I can, the necessity and the efficacy of prayers thus qualified.

1. It was observed before, that the vast distance between an Almighty Creator and creatures so poor and low as we are, required an express encouragement to justify our addresses to him. And such

^c Acts iii. 6. ^f ix. 34. ^h xvi. 18. ⁱ xxviii. 8. ^j Acts iv. 30. ^k i. fil. 12, 13, 16.
^l iv. 10. ¹ See Collect for the twelfth Sunday after Trinity.

encouragement might reasonably enough be hoped for; considering that our natural notions of God represent him infinitely good as well as infinitely great. The wise man's argument is certainly very just, that *God loveth all things that are*, because he *would never have made any thing if he had hated it*^m. And this affection in such a Being, it is agreeable to suppose, would move the common Maker, not only to preserve the things made by him, but to allow to each of them such degrees of happiness as their respective order and condition should render them capable of. Thus, so far as our knowledge of nature will carry us, other creatures seem to have been dealt with. And thus revelation assures us man was dealt with too: only with this difference, that he, being qualified for a voluntary obedience, was admitted into covenant with God, and had his happiness suspended upon terms. When these terms were broken, all title to the privileges depending on the keeping them was forfeited and gone. For the creature, not continuing the same it was made, had thenceforth discharged God of all obligations which he had vouchsafed to bring himself under, considered in the quality of its Cause and Maker.

If then the single consideration of our natural vileness rendered it a mighty condescension to permit our access to so great and glorious a Majesty, how shall we presume to draw near, and what reception can we hope to find, when we remember that we are sinners too? Is it not plainly one thing to be distant, and beyond all comparison inferior; and another, to have changed our nature, and so become polluted, and odious to a perfectly pure and holy Being? If by creating us God be a Father, and we his children, that relation cannot stand those any longer in stead who have been undutiful and rebellious children. If the original right of creation conveyed to God that dominion which implies the care and protection of his vassals, this claim is lost to traitors who have shaken off his yoke, and, as much as in them lies, alienated his property, by enslaving and selling themselves to his irreconcilable enemy. So plain it is that mankind thus degenerated could have no right to cry any more unto the King of heaven, could have nothing to look for at his hands but wrath and vengeance; and the more they understood of themselves, the more cause they saw to be overwhelmed with guilt and shame, confusion and despair.

From hence it follows, that if after this there remained any covenant right to the favour of God, this must belong to men by virtue of some subsequent and better covenant. A covenant of mercy suited to the circumstances of sinful men; and such as inspires hope by looking up to him, not now merely as a creating, but much more as a gracious and forgiving God. A covenant, which provides a Saviour and Redeemer from the guilt and misery into which all had been otherwise irrecoverably sunk. And this is the covenant with God in Christ; typified and foretold from the time of man's transgression, but actually accomplished and declared in the gospel. A covenant all along so ordered as to possess men with a mortifying sense of their own

unworthiness, and abundantly to shew that it is *by the blood of the Son* only that any of us have now access to the Father^a.

For to this end it was that sacrifices of living creatures were always a rite of religious worship. By the shedding whose blood men were given to understand, not only that their own forfeit lives were a debt to offended justice, but that all who from thenceforward were saved must be saved by the blood of another shed for them. This was intimated yet more fully under the Levitical law, when God appointed all sacrifices to be offered by the priest; when one only place was allowed to offer such sacrifices in; when one part of that temple was made inaccessible to all except the high priest, and even to him at all other times except on the great day of atonement once a year, (nor was he then to enter without the blood of the sacrifice.) And when the prayers of the people were emblematically sent up to God, in the incense carried by the priests into the holy place, and ascending in smoke before the mercyseat.

The substance and meaning of these figurative ordinances have been in some measure explained heretofore^b. But, as to the subject of prayer in particular, by God's keeping his covenanted people at such an awful distance, and accepting their oblations at the hands of the priest only, was signified that he must now be addressed to by the mediation of another; and who that is we cannot be to seek, after St. Paul hath told us that *there is one God, and one Mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus*^c. Again, that as God, so this Mediator is but one, was farther signified by confining all religious worship to that single place, which was a type of Christ's body, the tabernacle in which *the Word made flesh dwelt and manifested forth his glory*^d. The following remarks concerning the holy of holies I cannot think capable of a clearer exposition than that left us in the following texts to the Hebrews^e: *The priests went always into the first tabernacle, accomplishing the service of God. But into the second went the high priest alone once every year, not without blood, which he offered for himself, and for the errors of the people: the Holy Ghost thus signifying, that the way into the holiest of all was not yet made manifest, while as the first tabernacle was yet standing: which was a figure for the time then present.— But Christ being come an high priest of good things to come, by a greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this building; neither by the blood of goats and calves, but by his own blood he entered in once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us. And again^f: Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way, which he hath consecrated for us, through the veil, that is to say, his flesh; and having an high priest over the house of God; let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith. Lastly, St. Paul hath also compared Christ to the mercyseat, by saying, *God hath set him forth as a propitiatory*, for so the word strictly rendered imports. It being now with us as formerly with the Jews, that they who hope to find God propitious to their prayers must send them up here; that is, must sup-*

^a Eph. iii. 12. ^b See Epistle for Wednesday before Easter and Good Friday. ^c 1 Tim. ii. 5.

^d John i. 14.

^e Ch. ix. 6, 7, 8, 9, 11, 12.

^f Ch. x. 19—22.

plicate for mercy in and by him, and must obtain (as the apostle goes on) *through faith in his blood*^c.

From these and such other allusions to the religious worship of the Jews heretofore, and the correspondence our blessed Saviour holds to them all in the Christian worship now, it is evident that all prayer, without the mediation and merits of Jesus, is destitute of promise, or any foundation whatsoever of just hope to encourage it. It is also evident that his being our Priest, our Sacrifice, our Mercyscat, doth depend upon and follow from his dying for us, in such a sense and to such purposes as the pincular victims heretofore were understood to die for the persons that brought them. And from hence it is that *faith in his name*^a and *faith in his blood*^x, *being justified in his name*^y and *justified by his blood*^z, *baptizing into his name*^a and *baptizing into his death*^b, are phrases equivalent in the apostle's writings.

This is also further evident from Jesus being so often and so expressly declared to be the author and cause of those blessings which make the subject of our prayers. For whether we ask pardon for our faults; it is *through this Man*^c only that forgiveness of sins is preached unto us, and *by Jesus Christ that God reconciles us to himself*^d. Or whether grace to live better for the time to come; we are *renewed by the Holy Ghost, which God sheds on us through Jesus Christ our Saviour*^e. He is the vine, without the communication of whose sap the branches can do nothing but *wither and die*^f: he *the Head, from whom the whole mystical body, having nourishment ministered, increaseth with the increase of God*^g. If we implore any blessings or comforts of this life, this is the best confidence we have of success, that *he, who spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, will certainly be ready with him freely to give us all things*^h. If deliverance from or support under dangers and temptations, we are called to come boldly to the throne of grace, as sure to *find mercy and grace to help in time of need*; because *we have an High Priest capable of being touched with the feeling of our infirmities, and who was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin*ⁱ. If our desires look chiefly beyond this world, it is for his sake only that we can obtain them. On him alone depends our resurrection; for *Christ is risen from the dead, and become the first fruits of them that slept*^k: which assures us that *he, which raised up the Lord Jesus, shall raise up us also by Jesus*^l. On him alone the happiness we hope for in that state; for *this is the gift of God through Jesus Christ our Lord*^m; who at his departure out of the world left this day's consolation behind him, that he is *gone to prepare for his disciples a place in his Father's house, and that he will come again, and receive them unto himself; that where he is, there they may be also*ⁿ.

2. After so much said upon the necessity, very little needs be added to prove the efficacy of thus asking in the name of Christ. For besides the many promises made upon this account in the New Testament, and all the commands of seeking necessary supplies enforced with the

^c Rom. iii. 25.

^a Acts x. 43.

^x Rom. iii. 25.

^y 1 Cor. vi. 11.

^z Rom. v. 9.

^e Acts ii. 38.

^b Rom. vi. 3.

^c Acts xiii. 39.

^d 2 Cor. v. 18.

^e Tit. iii. 5, 6.

^f John xv.

^g Coloss. ii. 19.

^h Rom. viii. 32.

ⁱ Heb. iv. 15, 16.

^k 1 Cor. xv. 20.

^l 2 Cor. iv. 14.

^m Rom. vi. 23.

ⁿ John xiv. 2, 3.

encouragement of receiving what we want; the correspondence between the Jewish and Christian religion, already spoken to, gives us an equal right to those of the Old Testament. There is not therefore one assurance given to the sacrifices under the law, which does not more strongly affect our prayers under the gospel. For even those derived their force and merit from the typical relation they bore to the Christian Priest and Sacrifice: and as we now are, so they likewise were *accepted in the Beloved*; even him in whom we have redemption through his blood^o. Accordingly, upon this capacity it is that the author to the Hebrews lays so very great a stress through the whole course of his argument in that Epistle; declaring him *our merciful and faithful High Priest, able to succour them that are tempted*; and to save them to the uttermost that come to God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them^p. In short, there is so close a connexion between the merit of our Lord's sacrifice and the power of his intercession, that it is now as great an indignity to distrust of mercy and acceptance, as it would have been to flatter ourselves with expectations of success without it. Had not Christ died, it had been impudence to *hope*; but after that, it is infidelity to *doubt*: because such doubt would by necessary implication infer a questioning either the value of his sufferings, or the sufficiency of his power, or the truth of his promises, and in truth reflects on the whole scheme of revealed religion.

I close this argument with a remark or two, of which one would think there should not be any, and yet experience proves there is but too great need. The one is, that this benefit of being heard when we ask in Christ's name is confined, as the other gospel privileges are, to those who firmly believe in and sincerely obey him. Men may call themselves Christians to no purpose at all; for they do not belong to Christ, unless he be depended on as their Priest and Sacrifice, and observed with the duty owing to their Lord and King. They that desire to have their persons reconciled and their prayers recommended must pray in faith. And faith without works suitable to it is accounted dead, and can have no effect but such as is worse than none, the reproach and self-condemnation of the believer.

2. By the correspondence between the legal and this gospel High Priest, we may perceive not only the efficacy but the duty of prayer. God of old manifested his favourable presence at the mercy-seat; he does the same now to Christians in him, of whom that propitiatory was a type and shadow. But this is done in both cases to the priest offering up the prayers of the people: and he cannot in this respect do the office of a mediator for them who bring him no prayers to offer; for his business is not to pray for those who neglect to pray for themselves, but to render the prayers of those who ask effectual. Let us therefore, in a due sense of our obligation and interest, be fervent and frequent at the throne of grace; and esteem it a most valuable privilege that we may come thither holdly when *asking in Christ's name*. That is, as you have seen under this last head, when we humbly and heartily acknowledge ourselves less than the least of all God's mercies; when we disclaim all desert of our own, and approach as

^o Ephes. i. 6, 7.

^p Heb. ii. 17, 18. iv. 15. vii. 25.

becomes miserable, but believing and penitent offenders: when (after the example of our Established Church in her admirable Liturgy) we interpose the most prevailing name of Jesus the Beloved in all our devotions; and with the lowest opinion of our own vileness, which makes us unworthy to beg *any thing*, do join so high and honourable a trust in his merits, that we make no doubt of obtaining for his sake *every thing* that is expedient for us. For the more meanly we conceive of ourselves, (and it is but too evident we cannot exceed on that hand,) the nobler and juster is our faith in our Saviour's inestimable sacrifice and all-powerful mediation for us. To whom, with the Father and the Holy Spirit, be ascribed, as is most due, all honour and glory, thanksgiving and praise, now and for ever. Amen.

ST. BARNABAS THE APOSTLE.

A short Account of St. Barnabas the Apostle.

THE Scripture acquaints us that his name was originally Joses, that he was descended of the tribe of Levi, but born at Cyprus^a. This last was a circumstance necessary to be added for clearing the next thing related of him, that he sold an estate, and brought the purchase-money to the apostles, to be put into a common fund, then applied to the sustenance of poor Christians. For though within the promised land the Levites had no proper estates, yet if any of that tribe settled in other countries, this law could not be there any bar to their enjoying like properties with the natives of that place. Heroupon, as one of the first or most liberal contributors to so charitable a design, he seems to have received the name of Barnabas, interpreted by St. Luke *the son of consolation*. Though St. Chrysostom^b (attending, I suppose, to the word *Nabi*, a prophet) ascribes this name to those large endowments and virtues which qualified him so excellently for the great work he was designed for. Such as the Collect for this day refers to, and the Epistle describes when saying, *he was a good man, and full of the Holy Ghost and of faith*^c.

Whether he were, as some affirm, brought up with St. Paul under Gamaliel, is not certain. It seems to be much more so that he was one of our Lord's seventy disciples^d. Upon news of the good success which the publishing Christ's doctrine by some Cyprians and Cyrenians had found at Antioch, he was sent thither by the apostles to confirm the new Christians there. The number of converts grew so fast upon his hands, that he called in the assistance of St. Paul. These two continued mutual coadjutors for a considerable time; the effects and methods whereof have been already related in the larger account given of St. Paul. The occasion of that parting was there also taken notice of. Upon which at present it shall suffice to remark, that even these great lights were men of like passions with us; and that God upon this occasion did most eminently illustrate the wisdom

^a Acts iv. 36. ^b In loc. ^c Acts xi. 24. ^d Euseb. Hist. l. i. c. 12, l. ii. c. 7. Clem. Alex. Strom. ii. p. 410.

of his providence, by rendering the frailties of two such servants instrumental to the benefit of his church. For each of them thenceforth employed their extraordinary industry and zeal singly and apart, which till then had been united and confined to the same place.

After this, St. Barnabas is said by some to have travelled to Alexandria, and from thence to have returned to Judea. By others, to have preached about Liguria, settled Christianity at Milan, and to have been the first bishop of that church. All seem to agree that his last labours were employed in his own native country; and that by the malice of the Jews he was tumultuously assaulted and stoned to death at Salamis, the principal city of Cyprus.

He hath left us one Epistle, reckoned among the apocryphal writings of the first Christians^d. By which word is not meant always that such writings were not genuine, but oftentimes only that they were not received as canonical. It is full of piety and zeal; frequently quoted by Clemens of Alexandria; written in a style very allegorical, but such as the English reader may be both entertained and profited by^e. The opportunity of which is owing to the pious labours of the present right reverend and learned lord bishop of Lincoln^f.

The Epistle to the Hebrews hath been by some attributed to St. Barnabas; but that opinion hath met with very little credit.

THE COLLECT.

O LORD God Almighty, who didst endue thy holy apostle Barnabas with singular gifts of the Holy Ghost^g; Leave us not, we beseech thee, destitute of thy manifold gifts, nor yet of grace to use them alway to thy honour and glory; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

THE EPISTLE. Acts xi. 22.

22 *Then tidings of these things came unto the ears of the church which was in Jerusalem: and they sent forth Barnabas, that he should go as far as Antioch.* 22. Upon hearing what success the preaching of those brethren had (mentioned verses 19, 20), the church at Jerusalem sent Barnabas to strengthen and perfect the new converts in the doctrine they had received.

23 *Who, when he came, and had seen the grace of God, was glad, and exhorted them all, that with purpose of heart they would cleave unto the Lord.* 23. In pursuance of which commission, he travelled through Phœnicia and Cyprus, and at last to Antioch; exhorting them to perseverance and patience and immovable constancy in the faith.

24 *For he was a good man, and full of the Holy Ghost and of faith: and much people was added unto the Lord.* 24. In which he was very successful; for the piety and virtue of the man, as well

^d Hieron. in Catal. Euseb. Hist. lib. iii. cap. 25. pp. 373, 375, 389, 396, 410. v. 575, 577.
^e Acts xi. 24.

^f Pearson, loc. ii. 10. Strom. ii.
^g Apostolic Epistles by Dr. Wake, 1693.

as the eminent endowments of the Holy Spirit, qualified him admirably for a work of this nature.

25 *Then departed Barnabas to Tarsus, for to seek Saul :*

26 *And when he had found him, he brought him unto Antioch. And it came to pass, that a whole year they assembled themselves with the church, and taught much people. And the disciples were called Christians first in Antioch.*
name of *Christians*, or persons believing in Christ.

27 *And in these days came * prophets from Jerusalem unto Antioch.*

28 *And there stood up one of them named Agabus, and signified by the spirit that there should be great dearth † throughout all the world : which came to pass in the days of Claudius Cæsar.*

29 *Then the disciples, every man according to his ability, determined to send relief ‡ unto the brethren which dwell in Judea :*

30 *Which also they did, and sent it to the elders || by the hands of Barnabas and Saul.*

ing to the necessities of those under their care.

25. Which that he might the more effectually accomplish the powerful assistance of Saul.

26. By whose joint labours for a year together the gospel gained so much advantage at Antioch, that there first the believers of it were solemnly styled by the name of *Christians* in and belonging to Jesus Christ.

27. * Persons endued with that gift of the Holy Ghost and declare events to come.

28. † Throughout the Roman empire, as indeed it happened about two years afterward, and the fourth of Claudius Cæsar.

29. ‡ This came very seasonably, for the famine there particularly was sharp and long.

30. || To be deposited in their hands, and distributed at their discretion, according to the necessities of those under their care.

COMMENT.

THE subject of those good tidings referred to ver. 22 is, a great number of believers *turned to the Lord*. And the occasion of this numerous conversion is very remarkable. The eighth chapter^b had taken notice of a terrible persecution immediately after the death of St. Stephen. The rage hereof dispersed the new believers, and rendered Jerusalem incapable of affording safety or protection for those that made public profession of Christ. This dispersed the disciples indeed : but at the same time it dispersed the gospel too ; and opened a passage for the word of truth wider and readier than could have been found, supposing its proselytes quietly to have continued and assembled together in any one place. Those holy fugitives, who (in compliance with the great law of self-preservation, and with our blessed Lord's direction in the case^c) did, when persecuted in one city, take refuge in another, carried their zeal for truth to every city, and so powerfully recommended the cause for which they suffered, that the force of this doctrine wheresoever they arrived made its own way, even through prejudice and persecution. Thus were the enemies

^b Ver. 1.

^c Matt. x. 23.

by design, the greatest friends and promoters of our religion by occasion and in the event. And by the same overruling Providence which was formerly observed to disappoint the malice of the devil, and bring good out of the evil of his instruments, wicked men^k, the success of Christianity was such, that it does not appear to any considering person how the propagation could possibly have been so swift, or the establishment of it so strong, had less industry or cruelty been used at the very first, utterly to suppress and obstruct its taking root at all.

This providence of God in the disappointment of malicious purposes, and converting the sufferings and sorrows of his servants to their own and the common advantage, seems indeed never to have appeared so conspicuous and amazing upon any other occasion as that of founding and establishing the Christian religion. To this dispensation—all that had preceded were subservient. The importance and the extent of this blessing, the difficulties it had to encounter, and the necessity of demonstrating it to be from God, required the most illustrious evidence of a Divine power. But God is in all ages the same, in wisdom and goodness and tender regard for all that love and please him. Any community therefore of Christians, nay, any single member of such community, may, and ought, from such events as this before us, draw inferences full of hope and comfort.

Heresies and schisms and factions do frequently deform the face and break the peace of the Christian world: but even those have their beneficial effects; and by awakening the zeal, increasing the caution, exercising the meekness and patience, uniting the hearts and hands, and exciting the devotion and trust of the truly faithful, they do not only glorify God by the brighter shine of his servants' light, but they raise the credit and strengthen the assertors, and confound the adversaries, of truth and piety and regular constitutions.

Afflictions and injuries, poverty and disgrace, are some of the instruments made use of by the common enemy of souls to work our destruction. But instances innumerable have been of God's interposing so powerfully with his grace, that the sorrows designed to bear down have exalted and brightened the sufferer's virtue. Nay, and his wisdom hath interposed so seasonably too, in the overruling of events with regard to the affairs of this world, that those very calamities which portended nothing less than utter ruin have at length proved the visible and immediate occasions of surprising, of much greater prosperity, than without them, thus working together under a Divine direction, could ever have been looked or reasonably accounted for.

So often, therefore, as we cast our eyes on this or other such like narratives of glorious and desirable effects, produced from means, humanly speaking, improper and unlikely, let us not fail to make such profit of them as may do us service in the day of adversity. In all our distresses, whether public or private; under the most melancholy apprehensions for the church or for the state; when *the foundations are in danger of being cast down, and the overflowings of ungodliness*

^k See Gospel for Tuesday before Easter.

make us afraid; let us remember that *God is in heaven, and ruleth over all*; that *his ways are not as our ways*; and therefore, however he may suffer the malice of enemies, the treachery of dissemblers, the insolence of the profane, or the delusions of enthusiasts, to try or to correct us; yet, if we persevere in our duty, hold fast our profession, and attend upon him with patience and holy trust and Christian prudence, the blackening clouds will scatter, and the Lord will cause his face to shine on his sanctuary, and prevent its desolation, for his truth and mercy's sake.

Thus again, in our personal capacities: if our worldly cares be multiplied, our expectations disappointed, our affairs embarrassed, our sorrows enlarged, our bodily sufferings grievous; nay, even our souls dejected for want of spiritual light and comfort; still let the contemplation of God and the wonders of his providence sustain us. That Providence, which never fails them who in all their ways and under all their temptations acknowledge and patiently abide upon it, that orders all events for the true advantage of good men, and gets itself more honour by unexpected changes of heaviness into joy, and the darkness made clear as the noonday.

II. For the confirmation and improvement of converts, made by the zeal and assiduity of their persecuted brethren, the apostle of this day was sent with authority to supply what might be defective by any want of the like mission to their first instructors, and to carry on the good work by them so piously and so successfully begun. Of whose virtues and abilities when we read so high commendations, care must be taken that we do not so misinterpret these, as to suppose the glory of the large increase due to any but God alone. The seed of the word proves fruitful or otherwise, according as it is received and cherished, or despised and neglected. Much depends upon the quality of the soil upon which it is cast; and the preparations of this are from the grace of God exciting and working with the wills of men. This purges out the corruptions that obstruct its efficacy, purifies the affections, enlightens the understanding, invigorates the endeavours, and infuses that general disposition to goodness, without which the best seed is an unprofitable expense, and the care of the skilfullest sower labour in vain. But though the scatterer's hand be instrumental only, yet in regard the power of the gospel is a power of persuasion, it is a particular blessing to any people that God uses such instruments among them as are most likely and best fitted to persuade. Even in the season of miracles, the extraordinary gifts did not supersede the ordinary; they only supplied their weakness, and wrought effects of which those were incapable. When therefore to the endowments of the Holy Ghost this history adds the goodness of Barnabas, as the means of *great numbers believing and turning to the Lord*¹; the effect is, in the nature of the thing, very suitable to the cause. For the fruit of the ministry may most reasonably be expected to abound, where actions teach as well as words; and when the diligence of exhortation is seconded and set home upon the hearers by the influence of example. Great thanks are due to God for the benefit of such

teachers; great respect and honour and praise are due to the teachers themselves; but especially great care and jealousy are due to the souls under their charge. Because, if the product of such lives and labours be not great, the condemnation of them whose unfruitfulness disappoints their labours cannot but be very great.

III. Another thing worthy of remark upon this occasion is, the imposing upon the believers that name which hath ever since been made their distinction, and justly esteemed their glory, all the world over. The enemies of the gospel did in scorn call them *Nazarenes*, *the men of the sect*, and the like. Among themselves they were styled *disciples*, *believers*, *brethren*, and had such other titles as imported faith and charity. But now the successes of Paul and Barnabas had given them so much confidence, that at Antioch first they ventured publicly and solemnly to take the name of *Christians*, or persons belonging to and believing in Jesus of Nazareth, as the Christ of God, the Lord and promised Saviour of the world. That this distinguishing character was taken in solemn manner, we have reason to conclude from the propriety of the original word ^m. For *χρηματίζω* is used with regard to edicts and proclamations, such particularly as contained the people's professions of allegiance to emperors, and the privileges granted by them to the people; after which mutual declaration the emperor in that place was publicly acknowledged, and the accounts of state-transactions were reckoned from that era. As a further proof of this, we have the manner of imposing this name described; that it was done in an open assembly by Eudodius, then bishop of Antioch, and successor to the apostle St. Peter in that see: at the beginning of Claudius his reign, and ten years after our Lord's ascent into heaven. These are circumstances too considerable to be overlooked, because all virtually contained in the Greek expression; which gives a quite different notion of the thing from that too feeble rendering of being *called Christians*. And as St. Luke, the author of this book, could not find a more forcible or proper phrase for the solemnity of this denomination; so he could not do greater honour to his own city Antioch than by acquainting posterity that the proselytes of that place had, first of all others, the courage thus to take upon them a name which every part of the believing world gladly derive from them, and desire to be known by.

But it is of much less concern that my reader should understand the manner of this name being first given, than that he should be duly sensible of the weighty obligations which follow upon its being constantly borne by us. Now these cannot possibly be less than a firm belief of the doctrines, a conscientious obedience to the precepts, and as exact a conformity as we are capable of to the example of that Christ after whom we are called. Where these are not observed, the name which is meant for our crown and joy becomes our condemnation and reproach. To preserve an incessant remembrance of these engagements, each person at the time of his being incorporated into Christ's body receives that which is termed his Christian name. A name deservedly placed before the other, by reason it entitles us to

^m See Gregory's Notes, pt. i. ch. 36.

advantages more valuable than any possible to descend from our ancestors. A name more strictly ours than that of our respective families, because taken by us, not derived down to us. A name which we are infinitely more concerned to do credit to than that other; because a mark and badge of that covenant with God, upon the sincere discharge whereof all our hopes and happiness depend. And therefore, lastly, a name very properly inquired of at the beginning of our Church Catechism; because it is the signature of our profession, and an indelible monument of having contracted for those duties in which the child is there about to be instructed. In a word, if it be deservedly accounted baseness and degeneracy, to stain our blood and reflect shame back upon those forefathers who were men of like frailties and passions with ourselves, think how heinous a provocation it must needs be when those who *name the name of Christ do not depart from iniquity*", but minister occasion to libertines and infidels to blaspheme the Son of God and his gospel, through their impure and vicious, that is, indeed, their infamous, absurd, and contradictory conversation.

IV. The last clause of this scripture confirms my remark upon the first. For what could more conduce to the honour of the name so lately taken than those fruits of charity so agreeable to the import of it, sent as a relief against the approaching famine? The extremity and extent hereof Josephus^c describes at large. But the supplies here mentioned were principally applied to Judæa. Probably, because there the calamity fell heaviest, because believers there were like to find least pity, and because this was a fitting testimony of gratitude to the country from whence the means of their conversion first came. So early had these Christians at Antioch learnt the equity of that argument used afterwards by St. Paul, and indeed so far from Christians are they who learn it not—*If we have sown unto you spiritual things, is it (it ought not to be accounted) a great thing if we shall reap your carnal things*?

THE GOSPEL. St. John xv. 12.

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|---|---|
| 12 <i>This is my commandment, That ye love one another, as I have loved you.</i> | 12. See the Comment. |
| 13 <i>Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.</i> | 13. The highest instance of kindness capable of being expressed is for one friend to save the life of another by a voluntary laying down of his own in the stead and as the purchase of it. |
| 14 <i>Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you.</i> | 14. Now this proof I am about to give of my love to you, whom I esteem my friends, while ye continue obedient to my commands. |
| 15 <i>Henceforth I call you not servants; for the servant knoweth not what his lord doeth: but I have called you friends; for</i> | 15. And accordingly, though your Master, I do not treat you nor keep you |

all things that I have heard of my Father at the distance as servants I have made known unto you. are wont to be; but, conversing with the freedom and affection of a friend, have imparted to you all such purposes and secrets of my Father as are for your advantage to know.

16 *Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you, and ordained you, that ye should go and bring forth fruit, and that your fruit should remain: that whatsoever ye shall ask of the Father in my name, he may give it you.* 16. All which is the effect of my free love, which made choice of you (without the engagement of any antecedent affection of yours to me) to be attendants on my

person, hearers of my doctrine, witnesses of my miracles, and glorious instruments of planting and establishing a Christian church, to last till the world's end. For the success of which great work whatever shall be needful, God will give it to the prayers put up in my name. (See the Gospel for St. Philip and St. Jacob's day.)

COMMENT.

AFTER all that hath been written in the foregoing parts of this work upon that love, which the Gospel for the day begins with commanding, I should hope the Christian readers might now be addressed by me, as the Thessalonians were once by St. Paul,—*As touching brotherly love ye need not that I write unto you, for ye yourselves are taught of God to love one another* &c. But in regard it is not only a very possible but a very frequent case for men to acknowledge themselves obliged to duties in general, without either duly considering the full and proper force of all the motives which induce such obligation, or discerning the just measures and degrees to which they ought in reason to aspire; upon these accounts I could not but think it seasonable once again to press this matter from the particular enforcement of our Lord's example, and to urge the necessity of this qualification, viz. *the loving one another as Christ hath loved us*.

Now this qualification may import two things. Either (1.) a motive *why* we should obey, or (2.) a pattern or direction *how* we should obey, the command laid down before it. In the first signification it represents the equity; in the second, the measure and extent of our duty.

Some difference there is among interpreters, whether of these two senses ought to take place here. A disagreement of no great importance; since both, it is evident, are warranted by Scripture. For when St. John says, *Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another* &c; he justifies their interpretation who understand the text as a command of love, grounded upon, or at least very powerfully strengthened by, the consideration of Christ's love to us; and that we ought therefore to love others because he hath loved us so very exceedingly. Again, when the same St. John says, *Hereby perceive we the love of God, because he laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren* &c; he comes up to their meaning who

contend, that by *loving one another as Christ loved us*, is intended that *our* love to the brethren should be conformed to *his*, as its proper model, or standard; and bear a just proportion and resemblance to it in all its possible perfections.

I say in all its *possible* perfections. For we must either have very mean and unworthy apprehensions of Christ, or very lofty and extravagant notions of ourselves, to suppose the best good-natured man in the world capable of equalling the kindness of this Saviour in its utmost excellence. And therefore these are to be understood like those other expressions which command us to be perfect and *merciful* and *holy*, as and because our Lord and *Father in heaven is merciful and holy and perfect*: that is, that we keep this great Original always in view, and copy after it in little; observing such proportions as the vast distance between God and man render our nature and condition able to attain: that we make our obligations to be like God a strong incentive to our endeavours of being so. Thus here we are engaged to imitate the love of Christ to as great a degree as we can: and we are likewise to stir up ourselves to charity by that very strong obligation to it which this love of his lays upon every considering Christian.

My design accordingly at present is,

1. First, to instance in some particular qualifications, wherein the love of Christ to mankind both may and ought to be imitated by us.

2. Secondly, to shew the obligation we have to follow his example in these respects, arising from the contemplation of his goodness to us.

1. First, I will instance in some particular qualifications observable in the love of Christ to mankind, and such as both may and ought to be imitated by us in our love of one another. And here we shall do well to consider the blessed Jesus as our pattern; with regard,

First, to the nature of the affection itself:

Secondly, to the object or persons upon whom it ought to be exercised; and,

Thirdly, the proofs to be given of it, or those actions of kindness required from us.

I shall speak to these as briefly as the matter will well bear; and under each of them represent the obligation which this example lays upon us.

1. And first, with regard to the nature of the affection itself. Our blessed Saviour's love towards mankind we know was voluntary and generous and free. It was not the effect of any former engagement, nor entertained out of any prospect of advantage to be obtained from the persons thus beloved. For *who*, as St. Paul urges, *hath first given to him, and it shall be recompensed to him again*? And, *Herein is love*, saith St. John, *not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins*^x. The meaning whereof is, that all the marvellous methods of grace, and the great things done and suffered for us by Christ, were not by way of return to any former kindness or desert on our part; but the motions of mere mercy, and

¹ Matt. v. 48; Luke vi. 36; 1 Pet. i. 16.

^u Rom. xi. 35.

^x 1 John iv. 10.

his own will. He sought not ours, but us. His happiness could have suffered no diminution by our misery: but, when we had deserved to perish, he rather chose to have his mercy glorified in our rescue from destruction, than to signalize his justice in our eternal punishment and ruin. And of this choice no other reason can be assigned than his own exceeding goodness, and the incomprehensible greatness of his love. *He would have mercy, because he would have mercy*; and mercy triumphed over judgment; not because it was better for him, but because it was more profitable for us that it should do so.

Herein then our Lord hath left us an example, that we should follow his steps, in a kindness that is noble and free and undesigning: that our love should not be mean and mercenary, such as only does good to others, with a secret or distant intention of serving ourselves; but that it should terminate entirely in the party to whom it is pretended to be borne, without any hope or prospect of returning to our profit again. And I may well call this a *pretended* love only, since in truth, when thoroughly examined, it is but an empty form and fair disguise. For what colours soever of kindness it may be varnished over with, nothing but self is at the bottom. This is not doing good offices, but driving a trade by them, and putting them out to interest underhand. Which, after all, is not only the most hypocritical, but the most sordid way of imposing upon mankind. For it abases the best and bravest virtue; and profanes the sacred names of liberality and friendship, by usurping the praises due to these, while it continues not to be discovered: and when it is, by tempting us to suspect that this narrow principle is the constant spring and rule of men's actions, and that there is no such thing as true generosity and disinterested good nature and Christian friendship left in the world.

It is one thing to consider this duty of love as mere men; and another to consider it as Christians. Philosophy and human prudence, when they urge it upon us, proceed upon principles of profit and convenience. They tell us of the benefit accruing from the practice of it to private persons or public societies: and these are topics very proper for reason and policy to make use of for recommending it. But the Christian religion goes a great deal higher. And though it refuse not these motives, yet hath it a reserve of others peculiar to itself. It requires us to do good, because it is good; it draws us off from the consideration of present to the prospect of future and greater advantages; and expects that we should think the command and will of our Master a sufficient inducement, though there were no other to back it; that we in some degree resemble God himself, who is bountiful and kind from the essential goodness of his own nature, and because it becomes his character to be so. And as he is beyond all imagination liberal and tender, though it be impossible for him to receive or propose any additional happiness from the creatures he sustains and favours most highly; so we, moved by an inherent principle of Christian perfection, should not sit down first and compute what account our good intentions or good works will turn to; but carefully observe those rules of generosity left us by the apostle,

which fully express our duty with regard to the point before us. Such are, *not seeking our own profit, but the profit of many*^a—*pleasing every one his neighbour for his good to edification*^b—*looking every man not on his own things, but every man also on the things of others*^c—*no man seeking his own, but every man another's wealth*^d. And as Christ, *having loved his own, loved them unto the end*^e; because of that inexhaustible spring of goodness which was ever flowing, ever spreading itself to all who seek and receive its communications; so should our affection too imitate his in the constancy and perseverance, the sincerity and diffusiveness of our love. It must be *void of dissimulation*^f, *not weary of well doing*^g; not growing hot and cold in our hearts, according to the ebbings and flowings of uncertain passion; but proceeding upon the steady principles of reason and religion; such as are always fixed and consistent with themselves, and, if pursued as they ought, will not fail to *make us increase more and more, and to abound in love one toward another, and toward all men*^h. Which leads me to the second particular wherein our Lord's example ought to influence us, and that is,

II. In the object of this affection; or the persons upon whom it ought to be exercised. Now any person at all acquainted with the gospel needs not to be told that Christ was a lover of mankind in general; and that his goodness was extensive above (infinitely above) any that ever was in the world. Himself tells us, that *he came to give his life a ransom for many*ⁱ; that he was *lifted up* with an intention of *drawing all men to him*^j; that he came *not to condemn, but to save the world*^k; that the way was open, and, as *no man could come to the Father but by him*^l, so *whosoever shall come to him, he will in no wise cast out*^m. And lastly, that the malice and obstinacy of wicked men was so far from provoking him to leave off all kind attempts of doing them good, that he still retained his merciful inclinations, laboured long and often to gather those who would not be persuaded to come in, and persisted in teaching, exhorting, arguing, reproof, lamenting, and weeping over even the most intractable, even the most incorrigible. That he did all this, not only when he foresaw of how little effect his holy labours would prove, but also when the continuance of them exasperated his enemies the more, and brought his own person and life into manifest hardship and hazard.

The apostles in like manner testify that the design and influence of Christ's death and sufferings was of extent as universal as the blemish and punishment of Adam's sin. And as by the guilt of the *first*, condemnation came upon all, so by the obedience of the *second* Adam the *free gift* came upon all unto justification of lifeⁿ; that he came into the world with a purpose to *taste death for every man*^o; to *save even the chief of sinners*^p; to *make the aliens and strangers nigh unto God*^q, by reconciling them to him, and uniting them into the same common body with one another: and, in a word, that *in this chiefly the love of*

^a 1 Cor. x. 33.^b Rom. xv. 2.^c Phil. ii. 4.^d 1 Cor. x. 2.^e John xiii. 1.^f Rom. xli. 9.^g Gal. vi. 9.^h 1 Thess. iii. 12.ⁱ Matt. xx. 28.^j John xii. 32.^k John iii. 17.^l John xiv. 6.^m 1 John vi. 37.ⁿ Rom. v. 12, 18.^o Heb. ii. 9.^p 1 Tim. i. 15.^q Eph. ii. 12, 13.

*God commendeth itself towards us, in that while we were yet sinners, that is, enemies and rebels, Christ died for us*⁹.

What now can any man conclude from hence, but that they who are commanded to love one another as *Christ hath loved us* must open their hearts wide, and stretch their affections as far as he did his? That no part of mankind ought to be excluded, and that a narrowness of spirit can by no means be excused in a Christian, which confines all kindness within those very strait lines which either nature or fortune or private profit or personal obligations have drawn about us. My meaning is this, that we must not love our next neighbours only, for this is a point of convenience; nor our acquaintance only, for this is the effect of inclination, and we do it for our pleasure; nor our friends only, for this is required in gratitude and common justice; nor those from whom we hope to receive benefit only, for this is no more than interest would advise; nor our relations only, for this is the dictate of mere nature; nor them who are of the same church or opinion with us only, for that is but a serving and valuing ourselves. All this is no more than the sordid, the covetous, the proud, the voluptuous, the publican and heathen, the Jew or the Samaritan would do: but the Christian must do a great deal more. He is to distinguish himself by higher degrees of goodness; even by *doing good to all men as he hath opportunity*¹; by putting on bowels of charity for the most miserable, the most despicable, the most neglected, the most mistaken, the most obstinate, the worst of men, the bitterest of enemies, the most revengeful and implacable that even thirst after his blood. For in all this Christ is our pattern. He died, and, even in the inexpressible agonies of that most painful death, prayed for the very wretches that so maliciously persecuted, so barbarously tormented and murdered him. And therefore well might the apostle urge as he does, *Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil speaking, be put away from you, with all malice: and be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any: even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye*². If the most grievous provocations could have hardened our Saviour against us, if any worthlessness could have wrought in him contempt of our condition, we must have continued miserable and lost to all eternity. And therefore they who love as he did will not abhor the lowest estate of the most forlorn wretches, will not suffer the most disobliging, the most spiteful behaviour, utterly to extinguish all tenderness and compassion, no not to the most unworthy man alive.

These are such truths as people in cold blood are generally well enough content to allow; those people, I mean, who consider religion at all, and are desirous to be thought Christians. They will, for the most part, freely declare against hatred and revenge; and that they would not for all the world bear malice, no not in thought, against any man breathing. But however clear they may profess their hearts to be in this matter, how universal soever their charity and good-will to the whole world, yet it is but too common and too visible, that

⁹ Rom. v. 8.¹ Galat. vi. 10.² Eph. iv. 31, 32; Coloss. iii. 13.

very little of this general and unreserved charity appears in the outward carriage of many who pretend to it in the highest degree. Lest therefore they whose reason convinces them that the love of Christ ought to be imitated in the universality of it should delude their own souls by supposing that they love all men, while they barely profess to do so, I thought it necessary to consider Christ as our pattern,

3. Thirdly, with regard to the proofs of our love, or the instances wherein it ought to be expressed. For they who *love one another as he loved us* must, according to their power, and as occasions offer, be ready to give the same evidence of their affection which he was pleased to do of his. And what that was, the history of his life and death takes very particular care to acquaint us.

To enter into the detail of those proofs were endless; since every action, every word of his was a fresh one. Or rather, all he did and taught and suffered, in the whole course of his appearing in our nature, was but one continued act of love, diversified in its circumstances, as the wisdom of the agent and the occasions of the persons for whose immediate benefit it was intended made such variety requisite. In this he was so constant, so perfect, so lively and heroic a pattern, that we need only contemplate his behaviour, and frame our own by that model to practise this virtue in its utmost excellence. For though such sinful sordid souls as ours can never aspire to all the perfections of this Son of God, who is love itself; though the effect of the kind inclinations we may have can never be so great and so diffusive as his by whose kindness unspeakable benefits devolve upon all mankind; yet we shall do well to copy after this great original so far as we can, and that we are more especially concerned to do in these three particulars:

1. First, by suiting our expressions of love to people's circumstances in such a manner as may be most proper and profitable for them. When I urged the extending our charity to all mankind (under the second head), my meaning was not, either that we should love all men equally, or that we are to give the same proofs of our affection to all alike. Neither of those is reasonable, neither so much as possible. But in regard (by the first qualification I laid down) our love ought to be generous and free, and to terminate in the person's good to whom we profess it; it follows necessarily from hence, that in doing acts of kindness, we are not to consider our own convenience so much as theirs to whom we do them. And here again we are not always to be governed by opinion, but truth, aiming at what will profit most, rather than what would please best. It is therefore highly necessary that we study men's wants in order to becoming as useful as we can. And as our blessed Lord sometimes instructed and exhorted, sometimes cherished and fed his hearers by miracles, sometimes reprov'd and upbraided their faults with great severity; so we in like manner, if we will follow his example, must dispense to each as we ourselves are able, and as their condition requires. To the needy we must bring relief; to the oppressed and injured, protection and assistance; to the honest well-meaning and ignorant, instruction; to the weak, encouragement; to the sorrowful, comfort; to the wicked, reproof; and

to the scandalous and incorrigible, shame and punishment; forgiveness to our enemies; prayers and good wishes to all the world. In a word, Christ's behaviour is a rule to us for doing all the good we can; and doing it to as many as we can; and doing it in the best and most prudent manner that we can. And rather to hazard the doing somewhat that may appear harsh and give displeasure, than by too great a tenderness not to offend, and under the disguise of value and friendship, to do what in truth is the part of an enemy. Which leads me to the second particular in our Saviour's behaviour necessary to be observed and imitated by us. And that is,

2. That we make it our principal endeavour to express our love in acts of kindness to the souls of men. Our Saviour, it is true, was very merciful to the bodies of men. He sustained their hunger, he healed their diseases, he released them from the torment and bondage of evil spirits, and he died at last to purchase eternal redemption for this viler in conjunction with the other more valuable part of us. But still in all these, and in all his other acts of mercy, he had regard chiefly to the souls of men. Those very miracles which bestowed bodily health and soundness had yet a further end in view, and were designed for the gaining them over to holiness and truth. And in this spiritual life and health it was that their true, their great happiness consisted. Thus also we must shew all the kindness we can to men in every kind and capacity. But chiefly should we labour for their spiritual advantages. For no charity is truly Christian which does not alway keep God and heaven in its eye, and direct the good works it does to the salvation and amendment of the parties to whom they are done. All other obligations by which the body alone is profited are of so little value in comparison, that St. Paul, who yet was never behindhand in gratitude, speaks of those people with an air of disdain (if any such there were) who thought them equal: *If we (says he) have sown unto you spiritual things, is it a great thing if we shall reap your carnal things?* But if the kindness to men's souls be so much greater, so much more to be chosen and practised, than any that can be done to their bodies or fortunes; how far from the love in my text is that which men pretend to draw their friends and companions into sin by, and, under pretence of honouring the outward, destroy the inward man? Sure these of all mankind must not pretend to obey the command here. This is not courtesy, but treachery and cruelty; not civility and entertainment, but brutality, nay, even more than brutes' excess; a scandal to human nature, a contradiction to Christian charity: for surely they whose professions of friendship tend to the damning those whom he took so much pains to save, do least of all men living *love one another as Christ hath loved them.*

3. Upon this principle of Christian charity, designing the good of men's souls chiefly, is grounded the reasonableness of my third particular, in which Christ hath likewise set us an example. And that is, the thinking no instance, no act, whereby we may testify this love and profit others, too great; but being ready and willing to promote the

eternal good of our fellow-Christians at the expense of any temporal inconvenience or hazard. St. John, you must needs allow, hath carried this point very high, when arguing expressly, that *as Christ laid down his life for us, we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren*^a. But Christ would not have thought the bodies of men, or any temporal happiness, a cause or consideration sufficient for his death and sufferings. The reason this great work cost so much was because it was to redeem their souls. And each of these he who bought them hath taught us to prize above the whole world. Since therefore the body is not the man, but only the least and meanest part of him; when the parting with this may prove an instrument of great and manifest advantage to our own or another's soul, the laying down life in such a case is agreeable to that general rule in traffic and human prudence, of exchanging a less for a greater value. But we who are commanded upon occasion to expose or sacrifice our lives, are nowhere commanded, or so much as permitted, to commit a wilful sin for the sake of any man. And the reason is, because this brings the soul into manifest hazard and ruin. God can make a man good amends for the loss of this life, but there can no amends be made for the loss of the next. He that dies to advance the salvation of others takes the right course for making both them and himself happy; but he that sins against God in pretended love to another does him no good, and himself a certain harm. And even Christ, who is our standard in this case, would not, could not sin or be damned to save the world. And though we are not under the same impossibilities, yet we must be under the like firm resolutions never to run the risk of being eternally miserable for the sake of any the dearest friend alive. Any thing short of this is agreeable to the duty of *loving as Christ loved*: but this were to hate and to destroy ourselves. A thing neither reasonable in its own nature, nor agreeable to that love of ourselves which Christian charity hath made the measure of our love to others. Do and suffer and die for them, we may; but sin for their sake we must not. It is absurd as well as unlawful to desire so dangerous an experiment of love and friendship: and they who give it neither understand Christ's precepts nor follow his example. Who, though he grudged no suffering or hardship upon our account, yet never left us pattern or permission of being content to part with our innocence at any rate.

After insisting thus long on the words as they represent Christ's love to be the measure and rule for ours, I shall need to say but very little of them in that other sense, which makes his love the motive or argument of ours, and implies that we ought to *love one another* because *he loved us*. For who are we, in comparison of him, that we should grudge that to our equals which he condescended to for the benefit of poor wretches so many degrees his inferiors? But why do I talk of degrees where there is no manner of proportion? For none indeed there is, none can be, between God and man, Creator and creature, Infinite and nothing. Can any love be thought too great when provoked by such an example? I said we were in com-

^a 1 John iii. 16.

parison of God as nothing. Give me leave to call that word back again, for in very truth we were worse than nothing. As therefore the vast distance between the Son of God and us, as creatures, is an argument for the freedom and generosity of our love, that it should proceed without prospect of return, and serve those who are least able or likely to recompense us; so, when we consider ourselves as lost and wicked sinners, this enforces the second qualification, and shews that we ought to make it universal. For how shall we dare to exclude whom God hath not excluded? What unworthiness can be a bar to our affection, when we consider that all our dependance, all our hope, is in the worth and merits of another? What provocation can be so grievous, what enmity so fierce, as should with any colour of reason hinder them from forgiveness and reconciliation, who, if they be not forgiven ten thousand times more, must be undone to all eternity; nay, who are allowed to expect forgiveness of their own faults upon this condition only, that they from their hearts forgive the offences committed against themselves? Once more: how can we think any proof of our love too much, when Christ hath done and suffered so much more for us than we do or can do for one another? For never can the condescension, the meekness, the patience, the sorrow and anguish of his mysterious incarnation, his afflicted life, his ignominious and painful death, never can these meet with, I will not say a parallel, but any instance of charity fit to be named with them. What then can we do in any tolerable measure like his love to us? What wretches are we, how ungrateful, how insensible, if, after having received more than can be expressed, we refuse to pay back a very little! I say to pay back, for this is the only method we have left of expressing our love and thanks to Christ himself; since inasmuch as we do it to the least of these his brethren, we do it unto him.

I conclude with desiring my reader to observe how prudent a choice our Church makes in propounding to our consideration this lecture of charity, on a day that gives us the advantage of receiving, together with the precept, an example enforcing the practice of it. For such, in most eminent manner, you have seen the saint of this festival to be; who cheerfully devoted first his fortunes, then his labours, and last of all his life, to the service of God and his follow-Christians. This was indeed to love his brethren as Christ had loved him. This we have reason to esteem one of those *singular gifts of the Holy Ghost with which this holy apostle was endued*, and which we beg not to be destitute of, nor yet of grace to use them alway to God's honour and glory; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen ^x.

ST. JOHN BAPTIST'S DAY.

A short Account of St. John Baptist.

It is worth observing, that whereas other festivals are celebrated on the supposed day of the saint's death then commemorated, this is

calculated for the nativity of St. John. The only nativity, except that of our blessed Saviour, for which the Church assembles with thanksgiving. The rest did by their deaths bear testimony to Christ already come: he died a martyr too, though not properly a martyr for the faith of Jesus. But the circumstances and design of his birth were so full of significance and wonder, that this in a particular manner claims our praise to God; because his nativity was a warning and pledge of our Saviour, and rendered him, as St. Chrysostom expresses himself^a, a preacher and worker of miracles from the very womb. Hence, says St. Augustin^b, it is that the church this day goes out of her usual method, and pays a particular respect to the first setting out of this wonderful forerunner.

All that concerns this part of St. John's story is so fully related in St. Luke's first chapter, and so much of it will occur in the following discourse, that no more need be said of it. The evangelist^c acquaints us that the fame and expectation of this child had spread itself through all the country. This, we are told, provoked the jealousy of Herod to endeavour his destruction also at the time of slaying the children in and about Bethlehem. Zacharias is reported to have been killed in the temple for refusing to deliver up his son; and Elizabeth to have fled with him into the wilderness, and so early to have entered him upon that solitary life, which he persevered in till the exercise of his ministry called him forth, and manifested this more than a prophet to Israel. St. Matthew describes to us his habit and diet; *a garment of camel's hair, a leathern girdle, locusts and wild honey*^d; all resembling the rigour of that Elias in whose spirit and power he came. And, that the correspondence might hold as well in the miraculous provision as in the plainness of his food, there was a tradition that his mother Elizabeth died about forty days after their arrival in the desert; and that God commanded an angel to feed this important infant, till he was able to look out for his own sustenance.

His ministry will be considered in its place. His imprisonment is by Josephus imputed to Herod's jealousy, lest a person of such influence upon the people should dispose them to any insurrection. Macherus was the place of his confinement^e; a town and castle of great strength, a little beyond Jordan, and near the Dead Sea. Here he was beheaded, and buried (say some) between Elisha and Obadiah the prophets. The Gospels tell us the provocation^f: that it was rebuking Herod for taking his brother's wife; and that Herod, who had a reverence for John, was trepanned into this execution by the subtlety and malice of Herodias, which took the advantage of a rash promise made to her daughter, and instructed her to ask the Baptist's head in a charger. Josephus relates at large the wickedness^g both of that marriage and of this murder; the severe revenge taken by Aretas king of Arabia Petraea, brother to Herod's repudiated wife; the miseries which the restless ambition of Herodias brought afterwards upon both Herod and herself^h; no less than deprivation of his go-

^a Hom. de Concep. S. Joann. tom. v. p. 832. ed. Elton.

^b Serm. de Sanct. xx.

^c Luke i. 65.

^d Matt. iii. 4.

^e Adricom Reuben, 44.

^f Matt. xiv; Mark vi;

Luke iii. 19, 20.

^g Antiq. B. xvii. c. 7. and 9.

^h See Dr. Whitby on Matt. xiv.

vernment and perpetual exile: and the daughter is also said, by a fall through ice, which broke under her, to have had her head severed from her body; so resembling that death which at her request the Baptist had suffered before.

THE COLLECT.

ALMIGHTY God, by whose providence thy servant John Baptist was wonderfully born, and sent to prepare the way of thy Son our Saviour, by preaching of repentance¹; Make us so to follow his doctrine and holy life, that we may truly repent according to his preaching; and after his example constantly speak the truth, boldly rebuke vice, and patiently suffer for the truth's sake; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

THE EPISTLE. Isaiah xl. 1.

God is here introduced sending his prophets upon a glad message; which some refer immediately to the return of the Jews from the captivity, threatened ch. xxxix, but ultimately to the days of the Messias. The third and following verses, as applied in the New Testament, put the latter of these interpretations past all dispute. And therefore I shall attend to that only, as the sense most suitable to the purpose of this day.

1 *Comfort ye, comfort ye my people, saith your God.*

2 *Speak ye comfortably to Jerusalem, and cry unto her, that her warfare is accomplished, that her iniquity is pardoned: for she hath received of the Lord's hand double for all her sins.*

be effectually forgiven, and that God is satisfied with the punishments already inflicted upon that account.

3 *The voice of him that crieth in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a high-way for our God.*

4 *Every valley shall be exalted, and every mountain and hill shall be made low: and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough places plain:*

the part of those officers who upon the approach of princes are wont to go before, and see the roads levelled and mended, and all made commodious for safe and easy travelling.

5 *And the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together: for the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it.*

1, 2. Carry my people these glad tidings, to sustain them under their sufferings and fears; that the time of the Jewish servitude and hardship is drawing to an end; that their sin shall

3, 4. The immediate introducer of this gracious dispensation shall be John the Baptist; who, by preaching repentance in the wilderness of Judea, shall so dispose matters for the Messias's appearance, as to do

5. And then God shall manifest himself and his glory by the incarnation of

¹ Luke i. 11—20, 36, 57, &c.; Matt. iii. 2—8; xiv. 3—12.

his blessed Son, whom he hath appointed to be Saviour of the world^k. This is God's own word, and he will make it good.

6 *The voice said, Cry. And he said, What shall I cry? All flesh is grass, and all the goodliness thereof is as the flower of the field:*

7 *The grass withereth, the flower fadeth: because the spirit of the Lord bloweth upon it: surely the people is grass.*

8 *The grass withereth, the flower fadeth: but the word of our God shall stand for ever.*

(a carnal ordinance^l) shall then be abolished, and expire like a mortal man; but the gospel (not resembling it in weakness or unprofitableness) shall be the last dispensation for bringing men to God, and continue in force to the world's end.]

9 *O Zion, that bringest good tidings, get thee up into the high mountain; O Jerusalem, that bringest good tidings, lift up thy voice with strength; lift it up, be not afraid; say unto the cities of Judah, Behold your God!*

10 *Behold, the Lord God will come with strong hand, and his arm shall rule for him: behold, his reward is with him, and his work before him.*

11 *He shall feed his flock like a shepherd: he shall gather the lambs with his arm, and carry them in his bosom, and shall gently lead those that are with young.*

6, 7, 8. Man indeed is frail and feeble; his power is not able to obstruct or to bring about effects like this: but God and his promises can never fail. [Or as others: God gave this further message, that the Levitical law (called sometimes in the New Testament *flesh*, and a

9, 10, 11. Let this therefore be published all abroad, beginning from Jerusalem, and let it be carried all the world over, that God will exert his power and his mercy: the former, like a mighty conqueror, subduing all that oppose him; the latter, like a tender and compassionate shepherd, cherishing and condescending to the infirmities of all that obey him, and are desirous to be gathered into his fold.

THE GOSPEL. Luke i. 57.

57 *Now Elisabeth's full time came that she should be delivered; and she brought forth a son.*

—58 *And her neighbours and her cousins heard how the Lord had shewed great mercy upon her; and they rejoiced with her.*

59 *And it came to pass, that on the eighth day they came to circumcise the child; and they called him Zacharias, after the name of his father.*

60 *And his mother answered and said, Not so; but he shall be called John.*

Spirit, as ver. 41, or whether having known from her husband what name had been imposed on him by the angel, ver. 13) opposed it.

59. It being a son born above expectation, and like to be the only one, the relations were unanimous for his father's name.

60. His mother (whether by an impulse of the Holy

^k Comp. Luke iii. 5, 6. and Luke ii. 26, 30. ^l Gal. iv. 29. vi. 13; Heb. ix. 10; vii. 18.

61 *And they said unto her, There is none of thy kindred that is called by this name.*

62 *And they made signs to his father, how he would have him called.*

63 *And he asked for a writing table, and wrote, saying, His name is John. And they marvelled all.*

64 *And his mouth was opened immediately, and his tongue loosed, and he spake, and praised God.*

ver. 20, by Zacharias recovering his speech.

65 *And fear came on all that dwell round about them: and all these sayings were noised abroad throughout all the hill country of Judaea.*

66 *And all they that heard them laid them up in their hearts, saying, What manner of child shall this be! And the hand of the Lord was with him.*

which this birth was attended made people presage great things from such a child. And accordingly the blessing of God appeared to go remarkably along with him.

67 *And his father Zacharias was filled with the Holy Ghost, and prophesied, saying,*

68 *Blessed be the Lord God of Israel; for he hath visited and redeemed his people, the misery of his people, and, by visiting them in human flesh, hath brought them effectual redress,*

69 *And hath raised up an horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David;*

a descendant from

70 *As he spake by the mouth of his holy prophets, which have been since the world began:*

71 *That we should be saved from our enemies, and from the hand of all that hate us;*

we rescued out of their hands by a superior power.

72 *To perform the mercy promised to our fathers, and to remember his holy covenant;*

73 *The oath which he swore to our father Abraham,*

able, he confirmed it to Abraham with the solemnity of an oath. See Gen. xvii. 18; comp. Heb. vi. 13—18.

63. He by signs in return intimated his desire of a writing table... This determination surprised them very much for the reasons ver. 60, 61.

64. But yet much more so did the accomplishment of what the angel foretold

65, 66. All which became

a general subject of discourse in Hebron and all the parts adjacent; (comp. ver. 39. of this chapter with Joshua xi. 21, and xiv. 14, and xxi. 8—12;) and the wonderful circumstances with

68. Praised he God, who hath in mercy looked upon them in human flesh, hath

69. By setting up the kingdom of his Christ, to reign in David's throne, as him, and a mighty Saviour;

70. In exact agreement with the revelations to this purpose left by the prophets of every age successively.

71. That they who hate us, and design our ruin, should at length be subdued, and

72, 73. All which he was

so gracious as long ago to engage his truth for; and to shew that his counsel in this respect was unchangeable.

74 *That he would grant unto us, that we being delivered out of the hand of our enemies might serve him without fear,*

75 *In holiness and righteousness before him, all the days of our life.*
persevering constantly in all the virtues which his Son comes to teach us.

76 *And thou, child, shalt be called the prophet of the Highest: for thou shalt go before the face of the Lord to prepare his ways;*

77 *To give knowledge of salvation unto his people by the remission of their sins.*
him out to the people, that they, repenting upon thy doctrine, may be pardoned.

78 *Through the tender mercy of our God; whereby the dayspring from on high hath visited us,*

79 *To give light to them that sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace.*

and enlighten the minds of a blind world to find the paths of knowledge and safety.

80 *And the child grew, and waxed strong in spirit, and was in the deserts till the day of his showing unto Israel.*
ably, and spent his time in solitary places till the entrance on his public ministry.

74, 75. The effect of which deliverance from our spiritual enemies must be that of serving God with a thankful and cheerful spirit, by which his Son comes to

76. And thou, my child John, shalt foretell and immediately forerun this Saviour, to fit men for a due reception of him:

77. To give warning of him, and personally to point

78, 79. By that unspeakable compassion of God, who hath sent his Son from heaven, that, like the sun or morning star, he should disperse the darkness of ignorance

and find the paths of knowledge and safety.

80. This child advanced in natural and spiritual accomplishments proportionably,

and spent his time in solitary places till the entrance on his public ministry.

COMMENT.

THE portion of Scripture for the Epistle and that of the Gospel now before us will be most properly treated of together, because both agree in the same design of explaining to us the office and business of that holy Person, whose wonderful birth the Christian church this day commemorates. It was, say Isaiah and Zacharias unanimously, that he might go before the face of the Lord to prepare his way. Of the nature of that preparation, so far as it was intimated by the metaphorical expressions in the Old Testament, somewhat hath been spoken already^m. The further consideration of it was referred to this place, and shall now be briefly taken under three heads: (I.) the preaching of John; (II.) his baptism; and (III.) some significant circumstances relating to his person and manner of life.

I. With regard to the first of these more especially, we may understand those words of his father, who styles this child the prophet of the Highest, because he should go before the face of the Lord to prepare his ways, by giving knowledge of salvation to his people for the remission of their sins, through the tender mercy of God, whereby the dayspring from on high had visited them, &c. Which, the evangelist informs us,

^m Gospel for the fourth Sunday in Advent.

was done by *preaching the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins*ⁿ.

The prophets of former ages might, in a qualified sense, be said thus far to prepare Christ's way, that they also preached repentance. But none of them did or could preach it in the manner John did. They did not so boldly or so plainly warn the people how vain those confidences were by which they flattered themselves in being the holy seed, descended of the stock of Abraham. They did not so clearly discover to them that the venom of the viper still lurked even in those who were highly exalted with a false opinion of their own sanctity, built upon a nice observance of the Mosical ordinances. They did not draw the scene, like him, and set before their eyes that unquenchable fire, prepared for ungodly men and vainglorious hypocrites. But above all, they did not, could not, press the necessity of repentance, and the danger of delaying it, by that most quickening of all motives, *the kingdom of heaven being then at hand*^o. Consequently they could least of all be said, like him, to *go before the face* (or, as the Hebrew signifies, *in the presence*) *of the Lord*. The difference between them and John being in this respect the same as that of messengers sent long before to give notice of the intended but yet distant coming, and that of officers accompanying the motions and immediately ushering in the person of the prince.

This doctrine of repentance he likewise inculcated in its utmost extent and perfection. He awakened men to it by the terrors of the wrath to come^p; he contented not himself with bringing them to an humble sense of and deep sorrow for their past wickedness, but required a thorough change, and *fruits meet for repentance*^q. A change not sufficiently evidenced by forsaking old vices, unless the mind be also possessed with the dispositions and the life distinguished by the habitual practice of their opposite virtues. He puts their hopes of forgiveness upon the right foot; and suffers them not to be laid upon any of those actions, which, though the indispensable condition, are not yet the proper and meritorious cause of pardon. He gave *knowledge of the remission of sins through the tender mercy of God*. Not that mercy inherent in him as a being absolutely perfect; not those bowels belonging to the character of a father or creator; but that, *whereby the dayspring from on high hath visited us, to give light to them that sit in darkness*. Once more: not to that mercy which sent his Son merely to discharge the office of an instructor and guide; for when he represents that Son to the people as *the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world*, this is a manifest allusion to the lambs offered under the law, and to persons educated in that dispensation easy and familiar. The inference from whence was obvious, if not necessary, that he was to take away sin by the death and sacrifice of himself.

One cannot reflect at all upon these particulars, and not see the fitness of that preparation made by them for him who came to reform the world, to establish righteousness, to complete and to reveal the

ⁿ Matt. iii. 1; Mark i. 4; Luke iii. 3.

^o Matt. iii. 2.

^p Matt. iii. 7, 12.

^q Matt. iii. 8; Luke iii. 10—14.

whole mystery of our redemption. Had these principles been entertained with the same zeal they were taught, how smooth and easy had his way been made ! But they who lay grovelling in their mire of sin affected still to retain the situation of *valleys*, and refused to be *exalted*. The *mountains and hills* of Pharisaical superstition and self-sufficiency would not endure to be *made low*. The *crooked* dispositions of covetousness, ambition, sensual and worldly lusts, were not *straightened*, nor the *roughness* of angry, revengeful, haughty, and uncharitable passions *made plain* by this doctrine of repentance. And from that inefficacy of a preparation so competent in itself, the history of our Saviour's and his apostles' ministry assures us, it was, that so great a part even of their labours was in vain. Meanwhile, what hath been said abundantly proves how well this part of John's office was discharged, and how eminently he, above any other prophet whatsoever, deserved the title of our blessed Lord's *forerunner*, upon the account of his *preaching*.

II. Let us in the next place consider his *baptism*. Baptism was no new or strange thing with the Jews, but acknowledged and practised as an emblem of purification from past guilt, and a rite of entering solemnly into covenant with God. The expositors of their law agree that this ceremony passed upon the whole congregation of Israel just before the law was given at mount Sinai^r; and understand that command of God to *sanctify them*, which we render *washing of their clothes*, of a baptismal immersion of their bodies. The custom in all succeeding ages hath been to receive their heathen proselytes by baptism as well as by sacrifice, and (if they be males) circumcision. A practice grounded on that clause which says, *One ordinance shall be both for you of the congregation, and also for the stranger that sojourneth with you, an ordinance for ever in your generations. As ye are, so shall the stranger be before the Lord^s.*

And as it was in point of the rites of admission, so was it likewise in point of privileges accruing by that admission into covenant. The Jews receive their own children by circumcision and sacrifice; because the obligation of their law as to those is personal and express. But in regard baptism implies a state formerly unclean, they do not baptize their natives; as thinking by that general baptism at entering into covenant with God at mount Sinai, not the then body of the people only, but all succeeding generations descending from them, to be sanctified. In like manner, though the persons of proselytes are baptized constantly, yet are their posterity, born after proselytism, never baptized; because accounted clean by their parents' baptism, and so (as an eminent writer^t expresses it) *they are already Israelites*.

I have insisted the longer upon these things, (which are set in a very clear light by the late excellent labours of a worthy and learned divine^u;) because they help us to a plain solution of a passage which by being misunderstood hath ministered occasion to a considerable error concerning the matter now in hand. The messengers sent from Jerusalem to John after he had declared who he was not, and what he was, proceed with this question: *Why baptizest thou then, if thou be*

^r Exod. xix. 10.

^s Numb. xv. 15.

^t Dr. Lightfoot.

^u Mr. Wall of Infant Baptism.

not the Christ, neither Elias, neither that prophet^x? The Jews admit that one commissioned by Divine authority is not strictly bound up to the law, but may act and appoint things not mentioned there or practised before his own time. From hence many have supposed baptism to have been instituted by St. John, either in the whole or at least in the signification of it, as a rite intimating sanctification of the soul. Now the truth is, it was both used, and used as a means and emblem of purifying from sin, before. But it was used thus to proselytes only; to natural-born Jews never, except when the whole body were baptized (as a body) at mount Sinai. That therefore which gave surprise and offence upon this occasion was, that John administered baptism to those natives who were presumed to have no need of it: an indignity done to the supposed holy seed such as implied a reproach of uncleanness, and brought them down to the level of the despised Gentiles. And the requiring this as a necessary means for remission of sins, or testimony of that repentance he so earnestly urged upon them, was a disparaging innovation (in their judgment), which nothing less than a Divine authority could justify.

Meanwhile it is easy enough from hence to discern how signally John, above all others, was the forerunner of our Lord in respect of his baptism also. He first administered and exhorted to this ordinance, which our Saviour afterwards enjoined as an evidence requisite for every one to give in his own person of penitence for sins past, a profession of better obedience, a title to the privileges of a covenant therein renewed with God, and (in ordinary cases) a necessary protection against the wrath to come.

But faith is a qualification for baptism of equal necessity with repentance. And thus also John *prepared the way of our Lord*, as he propounded him for the object of their faith who received this ordinance at his hands. Herein St. Paul is express, *John verily baptized with the baptism of repentance, saying unto the people, that they should believe on him which should come after him, that is, on Christ Jesus*^y. It is true, the object of baptismal faith was afterwards enlarged when our Lord himself instituted that sacrament. Christians are bound to profess their belief in and dedicate themselves to the service of Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. The Trinity of Persons in the Godhead was a mystery reserved for the Son himself to reveal; John taught it not, much less required the profession of it. This was one imperfection in his baptism. Which, though it prepared men to be Christians, did not make them such; and consequently could not supersede the use and necessity of Christ's baptism, even to them who had been already baptized by John. The case of the disciples at Ephesus puts all this out of dispute. They had been baptized unto John's baptism, and *yet had not so much as heard whether there were any Holy Ghost*^z. Whereupon, after St. Paul's representing the deficiency of that in their present state, *when they had heard the argument quoted just now, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus: and when Paul had laid his hands on them, the Holy Ghost came on them*^a.

If it be asked, whether they were not baptized in the name of the

^x John i. 25.

^y Acts xix. 4.

^z Acts xix. 2, 3.

^a Ver. 5, 6.

Lord Jesus, who, when baptized, were taught to believe on him that should come after St. John, *that is, on Christ Jesus*. I answer, they were not. Baptizing in the name of Jesus imports the baptism commanded by Jesus; and I can see no ground for that distinction which some have inferred from the variety of phrases used in this matter; as if baptizing *in the name of Jesus* and baptizing *in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost* were ever designed to mean two different sorts or forms of baptism. We are baptized in the name of Jesus when we are baptized into the belief of the doctrine taught by Jesus; when after the manner and in the form instituted and prescribed by Jesus; when taking his name upon us as disciples, and professing obedience to all his precepts. The proper notion of doing any thing in the name of another is, doing it by the authority, in compliance with the direction, or with a dependence on the being upheld in it by the person so named ^b.

But waving this; the persons who, when baptized of John, were taught to believe on him that should come after him, were *not baptized in the name of Jesus*, because, strictly speaking, they were not taught to believe in Jesus. They were indeed taught so by consequence and necessary implication, because taught to believe on him that should come after John, who was, as St. Paul truly affirms, *Christ Jesus*. But they were not taught so explicitly and in terms, nor did John at that time either teach the multitudes determinately, or as yet himself understand, that Jesus in particular was the person that should come after him. He knew there was some excellent and transcendently great Person to whom the title of *coming after* belonged with peculiar reference to his own office of *going before*. And therefore the baptism of John did contribute greatly to *prepare the way of the Lord*, as his condescending to receive it was the method ordained by God for the personal manifestation of him to the people. All these things are evident consequences of those declarations made by the Baptist himself: *This is he of whom I said, After me cometh a man which is preferred before me, for he was before me. And I knew him not: but that he should be made manifest to Israel, therefore am I come baptizing with water*^c. And again: *I knew him not: but he that sent me to baptize with water, the same said unto me, Upon whom thou shalt see the Spirit descending, and remaining on him, the same is he which baptizeth with the Holy Ghost. And I saw, and bare record that this is the Son of God*^d.

Our Saviour could not stand in need of John's baptism as it was a baptism of repentance, by reason he had no sin to be purged away. He suffered it, because it *became him to fulfil all righteousness*^e. This being then appointed an instrument of purification to the Jews, it was not fit that he who came to be a pattern of perfection should neglect any ordinance appointed by his Father, any mark or profession of sanctity^f. That especially which they laid so great a stress upon, and held in so high esteem, who joyfully heard the praises, and justified God, being baptized with the baptism of John^g. But, above all, it was expedient for the introducing that visible and glorious testi-

^b See Gospel for St. Philip and St. James.

^c John i. 30, 31.

^d Ver. 33, 34.

^e Matt. iii. 15.

^f Chrysostom, t. vii. Oral. 95, 96.

^g Luke vii. 29.

many of Jesus being *the beloved Son of God, in whom he is well pleased^b*, and whom it is therefore the duty of all men to hear.

Thus John was most eminently our Lord's forerunner, not only as a preacher, but as a baptist too; in that his baptism was a solemn rite of renouncing sin; in that it was a profession of obedience for the future; in that it opened the way for a more perfect institution of the like nature; in that it exhibited Christ as the object of faith, the Master and Guide men ought to follow; for being thus baptized they were thereby led and consigned over to him, and qualified for the Christian baptism, which exceeds that other in dignity and efficacy. For here the Spirit accompanieth the water. This confers by its own virtue, actually and immediately, the privileges imparted by that accidentally and remotely. This confirms and completes that pardon of sins and those assistances of grace which belonged to no antecedent washings further than as they were figures of and approaches toward the Christian, and is therefore, by way of distinction and eminence, styled, *the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost^c*.

III. Let us now, in the last place, observe the baptist preparing the way for Christ in some remarkable circumstances relating to his person and behaviour.

1. The first of these is his being foretold by the ancient prophets; both as to the character he should sustain, and the successful discharge of it. This we find done particularly by Isaiah in his fortieth and Malachi in his third and fourth chapters. Passages all applied to John by the evangelists, and by our blessed Saviour himself^k. An honour so uncommon that some have understood him to be entitled *more than a prophet*, not only upon the account of his immediate fore-running our Lord, but because his doing so, and the spirit and manner in which it was done, were thought a subject worthy of former and long distant prophecies. Add to this the prediction of his conception, birth, name, manner of living, and ministry, by an angel sent from heaven for that purpose^l. The same angel that so quickly after brought the like but more joyful message concerning our Lord himself. The particulars of both which as nearly resemble each other as it is possible for the accounts of persons so distant to do. So circumstantial in this respect was the preparation made for the Son of the great God's approach by the predictions of him, than whom *there had not been a greater among them that are born of women*.

2. A second particular is his birth. His stock was of that set of men whom God had chosen for his own, and sanctified for the nearest approaches to himself in the priestly office^m. His parents both of an age that rendered issue unexpected, and his mother besides under a natural incapacity from her youthⁿ. So that this child was altogether miraculous; and as such a proper forerunner for Him who was born of a pure virgin without the knowledge of man: because the sight and certain assurance of the former astonishing event would,

^b Ch. iii. 22; Matt. iii. 17; compare xvii. 5. ^c Titus iii. 5. ^d Matt. iii. 3; Mark i. 2, 3; Luke iii. 4, 5, 6; Matt. xi. 10, 14. xvii. 11, 12, 13.

^e Luke i. 5.

^f Ver. 6.

^g Matt. iii. 3; Mark i. 2, 3; Luke i. 13—17, 19, 26.

when rightly considered, dispose to the belief of the latter. That this was one intent and use of it, we have the authority of an angel to instruct us; who, to establish the Virgin's faith in a message unaccountable to reason and impracticable in nature, urges this argument: *And, behold, thy cousin Elisabeth, she hath also conceived a son in her old age: and this is the sixth month with her, who was called barren. For with God nothing shall be impossible*°.

3. St. John did also *prepare the way of Christ* by his manner of life. This was retired and abstemious, austere and mortified to the last degree; and such a life became a preacher of repentance, who thundered out terrors to the vicious and hypocritical. But when reproofs and threatenings had awakened the fears and remorse of guilty sinners, and rendered comfort and encouragement seasonable to be administered, Jesus came to declare pardon and reconciliation; and it was no less agreeable to the character he sustained to be gentle and affable and courteous. It was foretold of him that he should *not break the bruised reed, nor quench the smoking flax*†; and therefore, that he might bind up the wounds of penitents cut to the heart, and blow up the least sparks of virtuous inclination, he shewed himself easy of access to the most profligate, and disdained not to eat and drink even with publicans and harlots for their reformation.

John did *no miracle*, and therefore found no way so fit as extraordinary reservedness and sanctity, to gain such veneration among the people as might dispose them to believe that *all things he said of Jesus were true*. Jesus was to prove his Divine original and authority by *signs and wonders and mighty works*‡; such as could not attain their intended effect without frequenting places of public concourse and mixed multitudes of spectators. His business therefore was to win upon their affections by his charity, to *go about doing good*⁴, and to convince men from their own experience that he came to live as well as die for the common benefit of a miserable world. The complexions and interests and engagements of mankind are infinitely various; and these require as different sorts of treatment. The life of John taught men how to escape the pollutions of the world by solitude, and going out of the way of temptations and allurements: the life of Jesus taught them that they may be safe in the midst of enjoyments and business and promiscuous conversation; that liberties may be so taken as to continue innocent; and society so indulged as to be even more beneficial than solitude. In the former the contemplative and reserved, the severe and melancholy, in the latter the sociable and active and generous, the sanguine and open, find their pattern and instruction. Thus there was a difference indeed in the conduct of that less and this greater example; but it was a difference of decency and order and use. Not only profitable, but necessary for bringing all to Christ; that they who admired the austerity of John might come to Jesus for the sake of his testimony; and that they who preferred the social virtues of Jesus might come for the love of his own engaging easiness. But they who would suffer neither of these attractives to prevail betrayed their own perverseness, and left no excuse, no

° Luke i. 36, 37.

† Matt. xii. 20.

‡ John x. 41.

⁴ Acts x. 38.

remedy for an incorrigible temper. From hence it is that our Lord mentions the very matter I am upon, and upbraids the Jews with the inefficacy of it under that parabolical expostulation, *Wherunto shall I liken the men of this generation? and to what are they like? They are like unto children sitting in the marketplace, and calling one to another, and saying, We have piped unto you, and ye have not danced; we have mourned to you, and ye have not wept. For John the Baptist came neither eating bread nor drinking wine; and ye say, He hath a devil. The Son of man is come eating and drinking; and ye say, Behold a gluttonous man, and a winebibber, a friend of publicans and sinners! But wisdom is justified of all her children*^s.

4. How John prepared the Lord's way in the whole course of his public ministry hath been already shewed. I add therefore, in the last place, that he did it also by his imprisonment and death. Although in the series of our Saviour's actions we are to place all that we find related by St. John, from the first to the fifth of his Gospel, between St. Matthew's account of his temptation and that of his preaching in Galilee; though our Lord had begun to manifest his glory by some miracles, and received some disciples, and baptized in Judea, while John continued to baptize in *Enon near Salim*^t; yet he did not so solemnly enter upon his preaching till the confinement of John made it seasonable for him to come into the same parts, and set out with the same subject. For the evangelists are express that, *after John was cast into prison, Jesus came into Galilee, and from that time began to preach, and to say, Repent ye, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand*^u.

Out of this confinement it was that John, by sending two of his disciples for the confirmation of their faith, made them at once witnesses of the Divine power and divulgers of the fame of Jesus and his miracles^x. And so contributed greatly to the fixing them in and inviting others to the discipleship of that heavenly Master after his death. With the news whereof we find those that adhered to him, and had done the last offices of respect to his body, immediately repairing to Jesus. And it is probably believed, not only that they were from thenceforth Christ's constant followers; but that the more considerable part, both of the twelve apostles and the seventy disciples of our Lord, were first initiated under the preparatory discipline of John.

But his death was further instrumental to this end, as it raised the esteem of John yet higher with the Jews, who held him for a prophet before^y. The scribes and Pharisees durst not return a direct answer to Christ's question concerning the authority of John's baptism, for fear of either condemning themselves by allowing it, or being stoned by the people if they should have denied it^z. The opinion they had of his virtues was such, that some thought our Saviour to be John restored to life, and that God had endued him with a power of miracles to testify his innocence and the wrongfulness of his death. The perplexity this surmise cast Herod into proceeded from a dread that the people

^s Luke vii. 31—35.

^t Ch. iii. 22, 23.

^u Mark i. 14; Matt. iv. 13, 17.

^x Matt. xi. Luke vii.

^y Matt. xxi. 26.

^z Luke xi. 6.

should revenge upon him the cruelty committed on so deservedly celebrated a person^a. And the subsequent calamities upon him and his family were generally interpreted a particular vengeance for the barbarity of that murder^b.

All these circumstances are meant to shew that the death of John, as it added to his own honour, so must it in proportion add to our Saviour's; and dispose them who held John in such veneration to think so much more honourably of the person to whom he bore such ample testimony, and was upon all occasions so solicitous to declare the preference, infinitely above himself, strictly due. Accordingly the Gospels seem to say that the prodigious increase of our Lord's fame broke forth and diffused itself immediately after the death of John. A death, in this yet farther respect forerunning his, as it was provoked by the discharge of his duty, sustained with exemplary courage and patience, and a martyrdom in the cause of truth and virtue.

Thus, after a long dark night of ignorance and vice, God was pleased gradually to restore light to a wretched world. The law and the prophets, like the glimmerings of the twilight, dawned first. The Baptist, like the morning-star, gave notice of its approach; and, in proportion as this disappeared, clear day came on, and the Sun of righteousness arose. God give all them who live under his shine the grace to walk as children of light^c, and in that way of peace, for the guiding their feet in which he visited us from on high^d. To whom, with the Father and the Holy Spirit, three Persons and one God, be all honour and glory for evermore. Amen.

ST. PETER'S DAY.

An Account of St. Peter.

WE have not any further notice of St. Peter's relations taken in the Scriptures than only that he was the son of Jonah and the brother of Andrew^a. Whether was the elder is controverted; but St. Jerome, and far the greater part of the ancient writers, give it to St. Peter. Epiphanius indeed thinks otherwise. But St. Jerome^b expressly imputes his priority to his years or gravity, as the most probable reason that can be alleged for his precendency before St. John the beloved disciple in particular. That he was considerably older than our Lord we may with good reason conclude, although the number of years and time of his birth be not known to us. The place of his abode as well as birth was Bethsaida, where he had been educated in the laborious trade of fishing. We have reason enough to conjecture that he was for some time a disciple of John the Baptist, being well assured that his brother Andrew, who first brought him to Christ, was so. St. Peter, being surprised with the news, comes full of expectation to see the person who his brother had assured him was the same that the

^a Matt. xiv.

^b Joseph. Antiq. xviii. 7.

^c Eph. v. 8.

^d Luke i. 78, 79.

^a John xxi. 15.

^b Adv. Jovin. tom. 2. p. 35.

prophets had foretold, the very *Messias*. And at first sight meets with a familiar salutation from him, and a promise of an honourable name, with which he should shortly be dignified^c. How long St. Peter continued now with Jesus, the Scripture does not inform us. But it hath been already proved that this was not the call to his constant attendance upon Christ; the circumstances whereof have also been sufficiently spoken to^d.

Our Saviour, being now about to choose his apostles, did first commend himself and them to God the Father, and begged his assistance in earnest prayer. *It came to pass in those days, that he went out into a mountain to pray, and continued all night in prayer to God. And when it was day, he called unto him his disciples: and of them he chose twelve, whom also he named apostles; Simon, (whom he also named Peter^e;) &c.* When the apostles were baptized, we have no good account; but that they were we have no reason to doubt. Some have been so fond as to think our Saviour baptized Peter only; that he baptized James and John; and they the rest of their brethren. But this is advanced without any ground, and it is easy to discover the meaning of it. Thus much we are well satisfied of; that these three were admitted into our Lord's more secret retirements, and honoured with greater manifestations of his power and glory than the rest. But that Peter was ever alone so favoured we do not any where find sufficient proof.

Jesus, having exerted his divine power in the feeding five thousand with five loaves and two fishes, had from thence took occasion to discourse of himself as the heavenly bread typified by the manna in the wilderness: at this many were offended, insomuch that great part of his disciples deserted him; which he perceiving asks the twelve, *Will ye also go away?* To which St. Peter with a becoming zeal replies, *Lord, to whom shall we go? thou hast the words of eternal life^f.*

Our Lord, willing to be private, and at the same time to make trial of his disciples' faith, commands them into a ship, whilst himself in a desert place continued praying. In the mean time a boisterous storm had made the voyage not only slow but dangerous. In the midst of their vain toils and fears they beheld Jesus walking on the merciless element. This put them into a yet greater affright, caused by mistaking him for a spirit: he, to satisfy their anxious doubts, makes himself known to them. But Peter's warmth, willing to distinguish itself, desires leave to make an experiment of his faith by coming to our Lord upon the water. Immediately, the waves rising, and his body and faith both sinking together, he implores help; which being given, with a gentle reproof, both returned into the ships. The storm, having now performed the business for which it was designed, forthwith ceased, and the winds and water with all speed convey them to their haven where they would be.

Being come into the coasts of Cesarea, Christ inquires of his disciples what opinion the people had of him; and afterwards, what the apostles themselves thought. Peter, their common spokesman, answers, *Thou art Christ the Son of God.* To which our Saviour replies,

^c John i. 41, 42.

^d Gospel for the fifth Sunday after Trinity.

^e Luke vi. 12, 13.

^f John vi. 67, 68.

^g Matt. xiv.

Blessed art thou, Simon Bar-jona^h, &c., as in the Gospel for the day. For the true importance whereof I refer my reader to the comment there.

The next remarkable passage we find this saint concerned in was the glorious transfiguration of our Lord, when Moses and Elias were seen with him, and Peter's advice was, to build three tabernacles for an abode thereⁱ. His words in some sense were prophetic, and afterwards so far accomplished, that history informs us three Christian churches were erected in this mountain^k.

Our Saviour, upon the approach of his Passion, began to forewarn his disciples of it^l; but Peter's affection for his Master, and his misapprehension of the nature of his kingdom, could not bear any thoughts of that nature, supposing it incredible that such affronts and indignities should be offered to the Son of God. Whereupon he receives a sharp rebuke: *Get thee behind me, Satan: thou art an offence unto me: for thou savourest not the things that be of God, but those that be of men^m.*

After this, he is made instrumental in a miracle, by taking up a fish with money in the mouth, for satisfying the demands of those who collected the tribute money at Capernaumⁿ. This was the yearly sum, payable by every Jew, to supply the service and expenses of the temple. To which though our Lord's argument plainly intimates he was not obliged, yet he rather chose to submit to the payment than to give offence, and incur the censure of contemning the legal ordinances, by insisting upon an exemption, the reasons whereof were not as yet convenient to be divulged.

Our blessed Lord having discoursed a young man very eager to become his convert, but who had not followed that wise counsel, to sit down first and count the charges^o, (that is, to represent all the difficulties before he entered upon the work,) was hence teaching his disciples what great impediments to godliness riches are, and how unlikely the possessors of them to forsake all, take up their cross, and follow him. St. Peter desires to know what reward their so perfect resignation of themselves and their fortunes should obtain. He is answered, that they should meet with ample recompense; and that, if not in this world, yet however when the Son of man shall come in his glory.

The time was now at hand for our blessed Saviour's celebrating his last and great passover; he therefore sends Peter and John as harbingers to prepare for his reception^p. They had executed his commands, and he comes to the house with the rest of his apostles. (Whether it was St. John's, Simon the leper's, Nicodemus's, Joseph's of Arimathea, or whether any of those, there is no necessity of inquiring.) Supper being now almost ended, our Lord, about to shew them an exemplary proof of that humility which he had so constantly recommended to them in his discourses, rises from table, lays by his upper garments, (which, according to the custom of those eastern countries, were long, and unfit for action,) girds himself with a towel, and, having poured water into a basin, comes to wash the apostles'

^h Matt. xvi. ⁱ Matt. xvii. ^k Adricom Zabulon. ^l Matt. xvi. ^m Matt. xvi. 23.
ⁿ Matt. xvii. ^o Matt. xix.; Luke xiv. 31—33. ^p Luke xxii. 8.

feet⁹. Peter, thinking it too great a degrading of himself, esteemed himself obliged to refuse the proffer. Which modest obstinacy he persists in, till informed that, unless he were so washed, he forfeited all right in his Master. But then eagerly replies, *Lord, not my feet only, but also my hands and my head.*

This ceremony being ended, our Lord foretells the consternation and fear his being apprehended should strike into them. Peter's forward temper and most affectionate zeal makes large promises of going into prison or death rather than he would be guilty of deserting his Master. Hereupon he is reproved by Christ for his inconsiderate though honest professions of kindness; and forewarned how great his particular failing should shortly be, notwithstanding the indignation the former prediction concerning the apostles in general had raised, that he should forsake, deny, nay abjure his Lord, and that three times, before the cock-crowing¹. He still, presuming upon his own sincerity and strength, proceeds to engage further, not only to adhere to Christ, but in an eminent manner above all the rest: *Though all shall be offended, yet will not I^s.*

Our Saviour after supper goes to Gethsemane, near which place was a garden, where the first conflicts began. It seeming good to Almighty God that our happiness should there begin, by means of the second Adam, where it had been so miserably forfeited by the first. His three companions, Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, were left at some distance from the place where he addressed himself to his heavenly Father. After two returns he finds them fast asleep; which this kind Master imputes to their frailty, and not to carelessness or unconcernedness for the danger then imminent. His third ejaculation was scarce ended when the traitor had conducted his soldiers to interrupt his privacies, and rudely seize him. The apostles, being now awakened from their secure slumber by so dismal an object, put the question, *Lord, shall we smite with the sword?* Peter, whose vigorous courage always spurred him on to bold and generous actions, not enduring the tedious expectation of an answer, strikes a kinsman of the high priest, which happily had no worse effect than the cutting off his right ear². Our Saviour, willing even then to convince the Jews, if possible, of his omnipotence, immediately heals the wound, and with a sharp rebuke commands Peter to forbear such unlawful and unseasonable proofs of his love.

Hereupon the disciples all fled. But Peter and John, presently recovering themselves, followed to the high priest's palace, where, at the request of St. John, they were admitted. Now it was that those mighty protestations were to come to the test; when that resolution, which had so lately opposed a band of armed men, trembled at the words of a silly maid; and that Master was denied for fear, in whose cause, not many minutes before, he had hazarded his life. St. Peter, retiring into the porch, probably to avoid more reproaches, was warned by the first crowing of the cock, which had not the least effect upon him. About an hour after, he is charged again; and the sus-

⁹ John xiii.¹ Matt. xxvi. 31—35.^s Ver. 33.^t Luke xxii. 49.^u John xviii.

picion arose from his dialect, or manner of speech^x, (the Galileans using a broader and more clownish pronunciation than the rest of the Jews.) To this denial he adds an oath for confirmation; and to his third, a solemn execration. So feeble are we when left to ourselves; and so ordinary is it to heap one sin upon another when men are conscious of guilt and a bad cause. It was now time to compassionate his infirmity, and to restore his understanding^y; which our Saviour, at the second crowing of the cock, did so effectually by a gracious chiding look, that the penitent was sensible of his heinous offence, and so deeply sorry for it, as immediately to flee out of the house, and there vent his passion in deep sighs and bitter tears of repentance.

Whether he followed our Saviour through the other stages of his passion we have not any account from holy writ. That he was first of all the apostles honoured with a sight of our Lord after his resurrection, we are told by St. Paul^z; and St. Luke^a, who relates the appearance to the disciples at Emmaus, seems to intimate as much. An infinite demonstration of mercy and goodness, to afford his afflicted disciple such early comforts for that sorrow which the remembrance of his sin had produced. After having appeared to the twelve at Jerusalem, they begin their journey into Galilee, whither he had lately commanded them to betake themselves, in order to conversing with him. This it is highly probable they might defer upon the account of their fears; those being now banished by frequent interviews, they set forward; and Peter, James and John, Thomas and Nathanael, being by the sea of Tiberias, betook themselves to their old trade of fishing^b. After many fruitless endeavours, they beheld upon the shore a person, probably in the habit of a traveller, who advised them to cast the net on the right side of the ship. Which when they had done, and enclosed a great number of fishes, St. John, remembering the former miracle in the like nature at their first calling, cried out, *It is the Lord*^c. These words inspired new vigour into Peter, who, impatient to approach his dear Master, cast himself into the sea, and swims to shore. There he finds a fire and fish thereon: which notwithstanding Jesus rejected, and required some of the draught^d. After dinner he applies himself more particularly to Peter, and three times repeats the question, *Lovest thou me*^e? adding each time this command, *Feed my sheep*. This question, so often reiterated, must needs be very pungent to Peter since his fall. Which having created in him a more meek temper, and increased his humility, he does not now prefer himself to his brethren, no not even when Jesus asked, *Lovest thou me more than these*? (possibly in allusion to his professing, *Though all be offended, yet will not I*;) but modestly declines the comparison, and appeals to his omniscience, *Lord, thou knowest all things, thou knowest that I love thee*. Thus was it thought fit that he who had so shamefully denied his Lord should as oft be obliged to make solemn and public professions of his love and reverence for him, each answer being a kind of reparation for his former offence.

^x Matt. xxvi. 69—74.^y Luke xxii. 61.^z 1 Cor. xv. 5.^a Luke xxiv. 33, 34.^b John xxi. 2, 3.^c Ver. 4—7.^d Ver. 9.^e Ver. 15, &c.

Our Saviour, after forty days, brings his disciples to Bethany^f. There, having given them all his solemn blessing, and commission to proselyte all nations by baptism and instruction, in the discharge whereof he promised the assistance of his Spirit and the testimony of miracles, he was taken into heaven, whilst they, full of joy and wonder, returned to Jerusalem, praising God^g. Thus far of St. Peter during our blessed Lord's abode upon earth.

The next occasion that presents him to us is the election of a new apostle instead of Judas^h. Peter, being the mouth of this assembly, introduces the choice, with the necessity of another witness of the resurrection, and the horrible crime the traitor had been guilty of. After which they proceed as hath been observed heretofore. Shortly after we read of the Holy Ghost poured out upon the disciplesⁱ; and St. Peter upon that occasion not only vindicates his brethren from the scandalous imputation cast upon that miracle by the astonished auditors, but effectually proves the mystery of our salvation. Which first discourse was so powerful as to gain no less than three thousand souls over to the faith. The next step made in this progress was a miracle upon a cripple from his birth^k. Which becoming publicly known created a jealousy in the sanhedrim of the Jews, that the people's hearts would be won to the belief of this new religion, unless prevented by timely care. Having therefore called Peter and John before the council, and examined them, they met with replies so full of constancy and courage, with reproofs so just, and doctrines so powerful, that proceed to punishment they durst not, fearing the people^l. Therefore, after some short debate, they were dismissed, with a severe prohibition to preach any more in this name. Such was now the apostle's undaunted presence of mind, that, not fearing that very assembly who had dyed their hands in their Lord's blood, and therefore were not likely to be very tender of his servants, they replied, that such menaces could not prove of any force at all to keep them from their duty^m, appealing to their very judges and accusers, whose injunctions ought to take place, God's or theirs. The many signal miracles done by their hands daily advanced their character among the peopleⁿ. And it is not difficult to imagine with how great regret and vexation of spirit the high priest and Sadducees daily beheld the sick in couches, expecting only the shadow of Peter as he passed by. They send therefore the captain of the temple (so called because his garrison was in the Antonia tower, near at hand, to prevent any tumults or seditions) to take them again; they complain of their strict orders so soon with so much confidence violated; the apostles return the same answer as before: hereupon they are committed to prison; but in vain do bars and keepers oppose the protection of an almighty power. The apostles were found in the temple preaching to the people, and yet the prison doors all this while strongly guarded. Enraged with the miracle, that should rather have convinced them, the Jews were now preparing the sentence of death, when Gamaliel, whose wisdom had made him more moderate than the

^f Luke xxiv. 50, 51. ^g Luke xxiv. 52, 53; Acts i. 12—14. ^h Acts i. 15. ⁱ Acts ii. 14, &c.

^k Acts iii. ^l Ch. iv. 1—3. 13—18. 8—12. ^m Acts iv. 19, 20. ⁿ Acts v. (1—13).

rest, diverted them from their design by a seasonable and most rational discourse^o.

The martyrdom of Stephen, not long after^p, and the persecution immediately consequent upon it, caused the disciples' dispersion, and consequently the speedier dissemination of the gospel. Philip, among the rest, had been very happy in Samaria^q. For the confirming of which city Peter and John were sent from the college of apostles at Jerusalem. Here they imparted the gift of the Holy Ghost by the laying on of hands and prayer. Here they confounded Simon Magus, and disabused the people who had been seduced by his sorceries and blasphemies. In their return to Jerusalem they enlightened many places about Samaria. During this interval, most probably, Peter visited Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, and made those converts to whom his First Epistle is directed. About the same time he is supposed to have planted the Christian religion in Antioch, and to have gone through the places mentioned Acts ix. In almost all of which he left some signal proof of a supernatural power co-operating with him. At Lydda, Aeneas, after eight years' palsy, was from bedridden made immediately whole; and at Joppa, Tabitha was restored to life and sound health after she had been washed and prepared for burial. After presiding some time over that church in Antioch of which he had laid the first foundation, he is said to have been succeeded in that see by Euodius, under whose government how gloriously the Christian faith grew and flourished, notice hath been taken before^r.

But the most glorious prize he bore was the conversion of the Gentiles, begun at Cornelius his house, and assisted by the donation of the Holy Ghost^s. This the brethren at Jerusalem were offended at, still retaining their scorn of other nations, till Peter's relation of the dispensation of Providence in it assured them that he had done nothing except what he was warranted in and commanded by a vision from heaven^t. This turned their murmurings into thanksgivings, and reproaches into praises. We have reason to think that Peter continued now at Jerusalem till his imprisonment by Herod^u, from which, a little before his intended execution, he was miraculously delivered by an angel. How he disposed of himself betwixt this time and the general synod in the fifteenth chapter we have various conjectures. After the determination of that council, Peter went down to Antioch, and there, by his practice and free conversation with the Gentiles, did confirm his approbation of the decree which had past, till fear of displeasing some Jewish proselytes caused him to withdraw himself, and use his former severity. For this St. Paul, as himself tells us^x, reproved him sharply, as having by his behaviour encouraged that party which not long before were by the general assembly pronounced to lay too heavy a yoke on the converts' necks. All which mightily discountenanced the Gentiles, and was an ignominious practice of hypocrisy, which he had deserved to be branded withal.

That he was married we know, being expressly told by the evan-

^o Acts v. 34.

^p Acts vii.

^q Acts viii.

^r Epistle for St. Barnabas's day.

^s Acts x.

^t Acts xi.

^u Acts xii.

^x Gal. ii. 11.

gelists of a cure performed by our Saviour upon his wife's mother⁷. Whom though some affirm that he left with his occupation, when he was called to the apostleship, yet we are told by better authority that she accompanied him through all his travels: and this may perhaps be proved from that passage of St. Paul to the Corinthians; *Have we not power to lead about a sister, a wife, as well as other apostles, and as the brethren of the Lord, and Cephas*?⁸ St. Augustine^a seems to say that he had several children, and so does Clemens of Alexandria^b. We are told, even by Baronius^c, of a daughter named Petronilla. His wife is said to have obtained the glorious crown of martyrdom before him. And Clemens Alexandrinus^d gives an account how piously her husband did both encourage and congratulate her upon that occasion.

Of his writings we have none, except his two Epistles. The First is confessedly his: the Second we have no reason to question his being the author of, if we consider there be some passages no way applicable to Simeon, the second bishop of Jerusalem, to whom some impute it^e. As the seventeenth and eighteenth verses of the first chapter, where he relates the transfiguration of Christ, and tells us himself was present at it; so likewise the fourteenth verse, speaking how our Lord foretold his death, with many other particulars, which sufficiently shew the writer. Five other treatises are mentioned by St. Jerome^f as ascribed, but falsely, to St. Peter. His Acts, his Gospel, his Preaching, his Revelation, and a fifth, of Judgment. In which account Eusebius also (as to the four former) exactly agrees^g, but makes no mention of the last.

That he was at Rome, and bishop of that city, is affirmed by so general a consent of the most ancient writers^h, that it seems too great hardness to deny it. But the time of his coming thither is matter of just dispute. They who place it in the second of Claudius, and from thence infer his presiding over that see twenty-five years, are not supported by sufficient authorities. Much less are they who relate his martyrdom in the tenth of Claudius. The occasion of putting him to death is generally reported to be, that he, assisted by St. Paul, had here also confounded the diabolical illusions of Simon Magus. Whereupon Nero, who was a great favourer of magicians, being provoked, (or, as others think, to ingratiate himself with the people of Rome after firing their city,) gave orders for his execution. Which the prefects, in the emperor's absence, took care to see obeyed upon him and St. Paul at the same timeⁱ. The latter, as a denizen, was beheaded with a sword; but St. Peter, who had no claim to the like privilege, was sentenced to crucifixion. This, and the torments preparatory to it, he underwent with marvellous patience. And, as a mark of his humility, requested and obtained to have his body fastened to the cross with the head downward^k, as judging it too great an honour

⁷ Matt. viii. 14; Mark i. 30; Luke iv. 38.

ed. Bas. ^b Clem. Alex. Strom. iii.

^c Euseb. Hist. l. iii. c. 3, 4.

de Success. c. vi. viii.

Catal.

² 1 Cor. ix. 5.

^c Bar. Ann. 60.

^d Strom. vii. p. 736.

^e Euseb. l. iii. c. 4.

^f Pearson

^g Euseb. Hist. l. iii. c. 1, Hieron.

^h Pearson

ⁱ Pearson

^j Pearson

to suffer in the same manner and posture as his Lord had. His body lay buried (says St. Jerome) in the Vatican, near the triumphal way. And there is no need of adding, with him, that he is held in mighty veneration by the whole city of Rome.

THE COLLECT.

O ALMIGHTY GOD, who by thy Son Jesus Christ didst give to thy apostle St. Peter many excellent gifts¹, and commandedst him earnestly to feed thy flock^m; Make, we beseech thee, all bishops and pastors diligently to preach thy holy word, and the people obediently to follow the same, that they may receive the crown of everlasting glory; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

THE EPISTLE. Acts xii. 1.

1 *About that time Herod the king stretched forth his hands to vex certain of the church.* 1. About the time of foretelling the famine, mentioned ch. xi.

2 *And he killed James the brother of John with the sword.* 2. James the Great, whose relation to John is here added, to distinguish him from the other James called the Less, and son of Alphaeus.

3 *And because he saw it pleased the Jews, he proceeded further to take Peter also. (Then were the days of unleavened bread.)* 3. The ruling part of the Jews hated, though the generality of the people are often said before to admire and love them.

4 *And when he had apprehended him, he put him in prison, and delivered him to four quaternions of soldiers to keep him; intending after Easter to bring him forth to the people.* 4. Sixteen soldiers had the care of him, who were to relieve the guard by watching four at a time. It was customary in the feast of the passover for the people to beg a prisoner, and not to be denied. (See Matt. xxvii. 15; Luke xxiii. 17; Mark xv. 6, 8; John xviii. 39.) To prevent therefore Peter's escape this way, he reserved his public trial till that festival was over.

5 *Peter therefore was kept in prison: but prayer was made without ceasing of the church unto God for him.*

6 *And when Herod would have brought him forth, the same night Peter was sleeping between two soldiers, bound with two chains: and the keepers before the door kept the prison.* 6. The very night before the day intended for his arraignment and execution. The manner of this securing men was, to fasten the prisoner to two, and have the door kept by the other two, of the four then on the guard.

¹ Matt. xvi. 18, &c.; Acts (v. 8. v. 15, &c.

^m John xxi. 15, 16, 17.

7 *And, behold, the angel of the Lord came upon him, and a light shined in the prison: and he smote Peter on the side, and raised him up, saying, Arise up quickly. And his chains fell off from his hands.*

8 *And the angel said unto him, Gird thyself, and bind on thy sandals. And so he did. And he saith unto him, Cast thy garments about thee, and follow me.*

9 *And he went out, and followed him; and wist not that it was true which was done by the angel; but thought he saw a vision.*

10 *When they were past the first and the second ward, they came unto the iron gate that leadeth unto the city; which opened to them of his own accord: and they went out, and passed on through one street; and forthwith the angel departed from him.*

11 *And when Peter was come to himself, he said, Now I know of a surety, that the Lord hath sent his angel, and hath delivered me out of the hand of Herod, and from all the expectation of the people of the Jews.*

9. He obeyed the orders, but all the while mistook the whole thing for a strong impression upon his fancy.

10, 11. At last Peter recollected himself, and finding the whole transaction real, took care to perfect that deliverance which God had put in his power by the ministry of that angel, whose assistance was now no longer necessary.

COMMENT.

THE other matters concerned in this day's solemnity requiring more than ordinary enlargement, I shall contract myself here; and only suggest some observations arising from hence, upon which if my reader desire to employ his thoughts, he may do it to good purpose by turning to the places referred to in the foregoing parts of this work.

Now first, we have in this, as in a former Herod, a tragical instance of the abuse of power, and of the merciless cruelty into which rulers and great men are betrayed, when once they let go the reins of justice, and become unsteady in the measures of government, for the sake of envy, ambition, jealousy, partiality, or any other corrupt passion whatsoever.

2. Of all those passions this scripture points us out one of the most dangerous—*affectation of popularity and applause.* With this the deadly poison is generally gilded by those who would insinuate mischief, and persuade to wicked because acceptable methods. It was because the death of James *pleased the people* that Herod *proceeded further to take Peter also*. Nor is this any great matter of wonder; for the humours of the people are so extravagant, and their expectations so unreasonable, that whosoever takes his directions from thence

is the greatest of slaves. A prince may see and repent too late, and wish to retrieve his liberty; but except resolution, assisted by the grace of God, and trust in his protection and assistance, break this chain, he will certainly minister occasion for that which is my

3. Third observation, the danger and misery of going past retreat, losing all remorse, and falling from one wickedness to another. Herod first vexed some private Christians, then murdered one apostle; and after that imprisoned another, with intent to give him no better quarter. But against these melancholy the following verses help us to set another most comfortable one^o,

4. The wisdom, I mean, and goodness of that ever-watchful Providence, by which the evil designs of such wicked men are disappointed, and his faithful servants wonderfully preserved from them. Concerning all which particulars see the Comment on the Gospel for Innocent's day, vol. i. p. 189, &c.

5. The fifth verse instructs us how instrumental the intercessions of good people are towards procuring such deliverances. And the mighty efficacy of prayers, when unanimous and public, especially if the subject-matter of them be somewhat eminently serviceable to the glory of God and the benefit of religion, may be seen in the Comment on the Gospel for St. Philip and James, and on the Epistle for the twenty-first Sunday after Trinity, above, p. 348.

6. But if those prayers be not presently successful, the case of St. Peter forbids us to despair. *Prayer was made without ceasing of the church to God for him*^p; but the angel was not sent for his release till the very night before his intended execution. Thus it is usual with God, for the clearer illustration of his mercy and power, for the exercise of his servants' faith and patience, and for other excellent ends, to forbear the interposition of extraordinary means till human helps and hopes are given over. This topic is largely discoursed on in the Comment on the Gospel for the second Sunday in Lent, and the sixteenth after Trinity.

7. As the season proper for miraculous operations is when ordinary methods prove vain, so when such otherwise inextricable difficulty is over, that season is at an end, and we are left to the use of common means and the protection of a common providence again. Thus our Lord commands Jairus by the usual refreshments of nature to preserve the life of his daughter, which nothing less than an almighty power could have restored^q. And thus the angel here, after knocking off St. Peter's chains, unlocking the prison doors, and causing the city gate to open of its own accord, leaves him when thus set at large to provide for himself^r. A plain instance of our duty to be diligent in the use of means when put into our hands, and not to expect those things should be done without us which by the due use of prudence and industry we are sufficiently qualified to do for ourselves. (See Comment on the Gospel for St. Philip and St. James).

^o Ver. 5—11.

^p Ver. 5, 6.

^q Luke viii. 55.

^r Acts xii. 7—10.

THE GOSPEL. St. Matt. xvi. 13.

13 *When Jesus came into the coasts of Casarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, saying, Whom do men say that I the Son of man am?*

14 *And they said, Some say that thou art John the Baptist: some, Elias; and others, Jeremias, or one of the prophets.*

15 *He saith unto them, But whom say ye that I am?*

the following one, which was, what notion

16 *And Simon Peter answered and said, Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.*

were agreed, and had but one thing to say) replied, Thou art the promised Messiah, the natural and very Son of God.

17 *And Jesus answered and said unto him, Blessed art thou, Simon Bar-jona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven.*

this to be a truth, not discoverable by human reason, or established upon human testimony, but taught and confirmed by the attestation of God himself.

18 *And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.*

19 *And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.*

nistration of sacraments, and by the exercise of discipline and censures appointed for that purpose.

13. Jesus, being alone with his disciples, took occasion to examine into their proficiency, by asking the people's opinion concerning his own quality and original.

14. To this each returned such an account as he had heard from men divided in their judgments about him.

15. This question was chiefly meant to introduce they themselves had of him.

16. To which Peter (whose single answer was sufficient when the whole company

replied, Thou art the promised Messiah, the natural and very Son of God.

17. Hereupon our Lord pronounces a blessing upon him (and in him upon them whose sense and in whose name he spoke), declaring

this to be a truth, not discoverable by human reason, or established upon human testimony, but taught and confirmed by the attestation of God himself.

18. (See the Comment.)

19. Into this church thou shalt have power to let in and shut out; by declaring the proper conditions of membership, by due administration of sacraments, and by the exercise of discipline and censures appointed for that purpose.

COMMENT.

THAT I may not be justly accused of derogating from the honour of right belonging to the apostle of this day, it may not be amiss to explain and vindicate some passages in the paraphrase which relate to him.

1. I suppose Peter, at the sixteenth verse, to have spoken the sense and in the name of his brethren. I do so, because the question was put to them all in common; as is evident from ver. 15: because they were all agreed in the same judgment, and so the answer of one only was needful: and because there are some reasons for Peter being that one rather than any of the rest.

1. That the apostles all knew and believed the great truth confessed here by St. Peter, no man, I think, can reasonably deny, who calls to mind the declaration made of it before by John the Baptist; or the acknowledgments of Andrew and Nathanael to the same effect^a; or the belief of all the disciples in that Divine *glory*, which by his miracle of the water made wine he is said to have *manifested*^b; or the solemn thanks returned to his Father for revealing to these *babes* the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven^c (of which this is the first and principal); or the confessions extorted from evil spirits^d, dispossessed before their eyes, and over whom they also had received power; or those voluntarily made by the sailors and passengers in the ship with him, upon rebuking the wind and the sea^e; or, lastly, that allowed on all hands to have been long ago made in the name of the whole fraternity — *We believe and are sure that thou art that Christ, the Son of the living God*^f. These instances abundantly expose the vanity of those who would persuade us that this was a truth now imparted to St. Peter alone by peculiar and immediate revelation; and that the rest stood silent, because this was a mystery above their reach. These again justify the interpretation current with the Fathers^g, who upon this occasion speak of St. Peter as the *common mouth*, the *tonius*, the foreman, the sustainer of the persons of all the apostles, and the like.

2. Not content with barely delivering this opinion, the Fathers sometimes proceed to assign reasons for it. As, that decency required but one to speak for all, that confusion and disorder might be avoided: that this denoted the unity which then was, and always ought to be among the apostles: and all, that this confession makes members of the Christian church. And,

3. That the probable reasons of Peter being the person are, either the natural fervour of his temper and behaviour, or his age, or his first being called to a constant attendance upon Christ; or that priority of place and order in which we find him in the catalogue of the twelve apostles. Any or all of which will account for his delivering the judgment of the company, and dispose reasonable men to think his confession the common voice of all to a question which had evidently been propounded to them all.

If this be so, then sure no blame can be laid on extending the blessedness pronounced at the seventeenth verse, so as to allow some share in it to them in whose behalf St. Peter spoke. For if this were an encomium of that confession, and the manner of attaining to it, they who had a part in the one ought not to be denied their proportion in the other. The less, because that authority promised to St. Peter as a reward of this faith here is in the very same words promised to all the apostles in the eighteenth of this Gospel; and it was also actually conferred on him and them together, immediately after our Lord's rising again, in a manner that carries not the least appearance of distinction or preeminence in authority to any of the whole number^h.

And yet it was very proper that the answer returned by our Lord

^a John i. 18, 40, 41, 49. ^b Ch. ii. 11. ^c Matt. xi. 25. ^d Mark iii. 11, 15.
^e Matt. xiv. 33. ^f John vi. 69. ^g Ambr. l. vi. in Luc. c. ix. Chrysost. Matt. xvi. 15;
 Act. i. 15; Gal. ii. 12. ^h John xx. 22, 23.

should be directed to St. Peter in particular; as it concerned words spoken by him alone; as his name (given probably to intimate that firmness our Lord foresaw in his faith) was a fit allusion to the firmness of that church which was to be begun by him: and as he made use of *the keys of the kingdom of heaven* in a more eminent manner than any of the rest, when made choice of by God to be the first opener of this door to the (till then seemingly lost and rejected) heathen world.

There now remains only the eighteenth verse not yet spoken to: which I reserve for the subject of this discourse. And because I would decline, as much as fairly I may, the fruitless and unreasonable controversies raised from thence, my business shall be to explain the promised perpetuity of Christ's church there contained; first, by some observations directing us to the parties concerned in it; and then, secondly, by others that may state the privilege itself.

I begin with the former sort.

Now here, first of all, it is evident enough, that whereas the church is capable of two senses; and, taken in common speech, sometimes for a society of persons worshipping God, sometimes for the place set apart for the public performance of such worship; the word in the text signifies a society of men compacted together into one body. Consequently, to that collective body it is, or to each person respectively as a member of that body, that the promise in my text belongs.

Secondly, the *building* this church is a metaphor frequently made use of in the New Testament; and signifies the doing all those things, either in private Christians or public communities of them, which may contribute to their growth in grace and goodness, their mutual strength and support, their perfection and continuance. Thus men are commanded to *build themselves up in their most holy faith*^d; and every one that hears Christ's words, and believes and practises accordingly, is compared to a house built upon a rock^c. And thus also Christians united together are called a *spiritual house*^e, a *heavenly building fully framed together*, a *holy temple*, and an *habitation of God through the Spirit*^f. Thus far then we are advanced: that our Lord by *building a church* means the establishing a certain society of persons joined together, like stones in a material building, by some common principles which should cement and knit them to each other, and so constitute and denominate them one frame. But were it not for this agreement, they would be like so many stones scattered abroad, or laid in an heap without form or beauty, or mutual dependence and relation.

Thirdly, the thing in which they are to be thus united is *the rock*. And what is that rock? The person of Peter abstractedly considered? No certainly. For this construction equals Peter to Christ himself; and *other foundation can no man lay, than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ*^h. Now, wheresoever mention is made of the church being built upon the apostlesⁱ and prophets, the same honour is attri-

^c See Comment on the Epistle for St. Mark.

^f 1 Pet. ii. 3.

^e Eph. ii. 21, 22.

^d Jude 20.

^h 1 Cor. iii. 11.

^e Matt. vii. 24.

ⁱ Eph. ii.

buted to the rest as is to Peter; and *Jesus Christ himself* is called *the chief corner stone* in which the whole centres. Thus Christ is expressly called *the Rock*^k, and *salvation declared to be had in no other*^l. Therefore some other constructions shall be mentioned as much more probable. Such is that which supposes Christ to mean himself, and pointing to his own person in the utterance of those words; as he seems to have done on another like occasion, when saying to the Jews, *Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up*^m. Or that which makes the faith and confession of Peter the rock on which this church was to be built. Or that which says, the church might be said to be built upon Peter, as the twelve apostles are called *the twelve foundations*; because it was begun and carried up by their holy labours and zeal. And thus some apply it to their successors also in the Christian church. Not but that Peter hath some privileges superior to the rest; as he was made choice of by God to lay as it were the first stone both of the Jews and Gentiles. The former in his most efficacious sermon at the day of Pentecostⁿ: the latter in the conversion of Cornelius and his company^o. But in these senses still the faith and confession of Peter is of most important consideration. For if that were not the rock itself, yet even they who contend for Peter's being the rock must allow that this confession, and his part in the propagation of it, was the occasion of so extraordinary an honour. And therefore the inference I am about to draw from hence is what none who calls himself a Christian (I think) will deny me; which is, that the church is a society of men agreeing with St. Peter; a body linked together by one common band, and distinguished by that character, of *confessing*, as he did, that *Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God*.

Having thus seen to whom the promise in my text belongs, I now come to consider the words themselves, that *the gates of hell shall not prevail against this church*, that is, against the believers in Christ. Which we shall find no great difficulty to understand when once it is agreed what *the gates of hell* here import. Of which, two senses especially have been insisted on by learned men. And because they are both of them agreeable to the truth, I shall propound them to my reader's consideration, and endeavour to leave each upon him with such useful reflections as the promise, thus taken, naturally leads us to.

First then, some interpreters by the word *hades* here, which we translate *hell*, would have no more to be meant than the state or place of souls departed^p. And then by *the gates of hell* is meant only what the ancient poets and other heathen writers intended by that periphrasis of this common receptacle of the dead compared to a house or strong prison, and styled likewise in Scripture *the gate of the grave*^q. Or if by *gates* we will have *strength* to be meant, then it denotes the power of death, and the importance of the words comes to thus much: that although Christ have not so vanquished death as to set his servants and followers out of a condition of dying, yet

^k 1 Cor. x. 4.^l Acts iv. 12.^m John ii. 19.ⁿ Acts ii.^o Acts x.^p Grot. in loc.^q Isaiah xxxviii. 10.

hath not death gained a final and absolute conquest over them *that die in the Lord*. For they shall certainly one day be rescued; this universal devourer of mankind shall be forced to give up his prey: and even the dead, that believed and obeyed this *Christ and Son of God*, shall rise again, and live and reign with him in fulness of joy for evermore. And thus *the gates of hell shall not prevail against the church*; in regard the members of which that body is composed shall not continue dead to all eternity, but revive a second time to a better life, and triumph over this last great enemy of mankind.

The promise thus expounded is full of grace and comfort, valuable to Christians of all ages, but more especially seasonable and necessary to the first preachers and professors of our faith. For they, besides the same fate of mortality and natural decay common to them with other men, exposed themselves upon the account of this confession made by St. Peter here, and asserted *Jesus to be the Christ, the Son of the living God*, at the utmost peril of their lives. Now what could more conduce to the establishing their minds in this undertaking than the assurance of a future state? How indeed was it possible for them to have gone through with it, had they not been supported by a strong persuasion that death could not make an utter end of them; and that when their persecutors had carried their malice to the very last point in killing their bodies, there was one mightier than they above, one who had engaged his truth to see them well considered, and would not fail to make them large amends for all they did and suffered in the flesh?

The same assurance is no more than needful even in the most peaceable times of religion. For though wicked men and gainsayers do not declare open war against the truth, yet there can never be a truce between our carnal appetites and the severities of a Christian conversation. The calamities we are subject to, exercise our patience, and make life sometimes a burden, even to those who in the eye of the world pass for prosperous and easy men. But when we consider the afflicted and oppressed, the mortified and the resigned, the conflicts that the saints undergo, the voluntary hardships they impose upon themselves, the many advantages and pleasing enjoyments they are content to be debarred of, for their exceeding love of God and virtue; it must be confessed that men could very hardly be persuaded to a conduct so reserved, so full of austerity, were there not a reversion hereafter, so very much to be preferred before any present fruition here, that the mere expectation of this makes all we can do for securing it to ourselves highly reasonable. And therefore we have reason to esteem this promise very highly; as that which, if well and wisely applied, would soften and assuage our troubles and misfortunes, sweeten those self-denying duties which human nature thinks harsh and hard of digestion, and reconcile us to the thought and necessity of dying, when we are satisfied that *the gates of hell shall not prevail against us*; that is, that we die, not for ever, but only like plants in the winter, cease our verdure for a while, and disappear. Yet so, that the principle of life remains, though the signs and out-

ward effects of it be withdrawn; and we shall bud and flourish again more vigorous, more beautiful than before, in never-fading glories and an eternal spring.

Secondly, others¹ contend for the more vulgar and usual sense of the word, and by *hell* understanding the place of infernal torments, apply it by an easy figure to the devil and his angels, inhabiting those regions of darkness. Now in regard that in cities the gates were barred and fortified against enemies and invaders, and so places of strength; in regard also that these, among the Jews especially, were the places where the judges and magistrates assembled for distributing of justice, and consulting what measures were fit to be taken for the security of the public; hence they understand by this phrase policy and force. And then this promise made the church amounts to—thus much; that notwithstanding the devil and his instruments, wicked men and damned spirits, are irreconcilable enemies to the progress of the Christian faith, and do all they can to obstruct the salvation of men's souls; yet all in vain: Christianity shall stand and flourish in spite of them, and all their subtlety and strength shall not be able to bring about their wicked purposes of defeating and overthrowing it.

Here again the constructions put upon this promise are twofold, as we choose to apply it either to private Christians, or to the body of them united as a church.

First, there are some who apply it to the church in a distributive sense², so that every private Christian may take it to himself. And thus, by the gates of hell not prevailing against believers, is intended, that sin and temptations shall not be the final ruin of those who steadfastly in practice and profession adhere to this truth, that *Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God*. Now for the right understanding of this promise thus interpreted we are to observe these three things:

1. First, that our Saviour does not intend by it an absolute freedom from temptations. For the proper perfection of a Christian does not consist in never being tempted at all, but in not being led away and overcome when he is tempted. The house built upon a rock is described with the winds blowing and the waves beating upon it; and the safety of that house is said to lie, not in the not feeling, or not being shaken by storms, but in not falling when it blows hardest. Our life is called a *warfare*; and the enemy of souls, one *who goeth about continually seeking whom he may devour*³. Conflicts and difficulties and dangers await us everywhere; and this is the consideration which makes our constant care and watchfulness necessary. *The whole armour of God* is therefore prescribed us, because enter the lists and fight we must. But if we can *stand in the evil day* we shall do well; and the promise does not pretend to soothe us with security, as if *the gates of hell* would never attempt any thing to our prejudice, but to support us with hopes of escaping, and coming off victorious at last, by this assurance, that though they do attempt, yet *they shall not prevail against us*.

¹ Calvin.² Gerhard. Calvin. Theophylact.³ 1 Pet. v. 8.

2. Secondly, neither is this promise of *not prevailing* to be so far extended as that true believers should never fall into sin. We have a mighty and a very cunning adversary to deal with; one who will let no advantage slip, but endeavours by wonderful address to turn every action, every accident of our lives, into an occasion of eternal ruin. And this design is extremely favoured by the infirmities and inclinations of corrupt nature; by which we are, when left to ourselves, much more disposed to comply with temptations than to resist them. Even they who keep the strictest guard are sometimes overcome with slumber, and either yield to the importunity of the enemy, or unwarily take part with him against themselves. Were not the case thus with us, repentance would not be made one necessary condition of salvation. But because *all have sinned and come short of the glory of God*^a; and in many things we offend every one of us^b; for this reason even the just man is so reputed by faith in the merits of another, and such as may be accounted to him for righteousness. For this reason the law of works is insufficient for our purpose; and the covenant of grace hath found a remedy for them, with whom if God should enter into judgment, and be extreme to mark what is done amiss, no flesh living could be justified^c, none could abide the rigorous scrutiny. Therefore,

3. Thirdly, the true intention of this encouragement given to each private Christian is, that, provided such do sincerely abide in the belief and obedience of their Lord and Master, they shall not perish nor fall away finally. Although the way they go be strait and rugged, full of snares and precipices, yet they shall be led through it safely: although their infirmities be great and many, yet they shall be kept through the power of God unto salvation, and enabled to do all things by Christ that strengthens them^d: although they cannot pay a pure unswerving obedience, yet their failings shall be pitied, their iniquities pardoned; if they fall, they shall recover their standing, rally their forces again, combat successfully; and, being endued with the grace of perseverance, by enduring faithfully to the end shall at last be saved, and come off with glory and triumph.

This consideration, if duly laid to heart, will animate us in all our spiritual encounters. And therefore, when the remembrance of our past offences afflicts us, and the sense of our own weakness and corruption puts a damp upon our spirits; when the dread of so potent an enemy, and the returns of temptation coming thick upon us, create some doubts and disquieting fears what may be the event of all these things at last; let us remember, that *they that are for us are more and mightier than they that are against us*^e; that Christ hath promised he will never leave us nor forsake us^f, that his grace is sufficient for us^g; for the Divine strength is illustrated and made perfect in human weakness. The sum of all which, and many such comfortable texts of Scripture, in short, is this, that if we do our parts God will not fail to do his; that he, who hath baffled this enemy himself, can and will render us victorious over him too; and, provided we do not by any

^a Rom. iii. 23. ^x James iii. 2. ^r Psalm cxxx. 3. cxliii. 2. ^s 1 Pet. i. 5; Ph. l. iv. 13.

^b Rom. viii. 31. ^h Heb. xiii. 5. ^c 2 Cor. xii. 9.

wilful neglect fall from our own steadfastness, *the gates of hell shall not prevail against us.*

Lift up then the hands that hang down, and comfort yourselves, ye feeble-minded: for your endeavours, if honest, though imperfect, shall yet be kindly accepted; your unaffected failings shall find compassion; and, as sure as God is true, you shall at last, though it may be through much tribulation and hardship, enter into the kingdom of heaven.

I come now, in the last place, to consider that sense of the passage which is most usually insisted on as it concerns the church collectively; that is, Christians, not in their single and private capacities, but as they are united into one body. And then the promise implies thus much, that, notwithstanding all the wicked contrivances of Satan and his instruments to the contrary, Christ will always preserve to himself a true church; that is, he will take care that there shall never to the world's end want a society of men confessing, with St. Peter, that *Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God.*

Now upon this occasion we must observe,

1. First, that by confessing *Jesus to be Christ, the Son of the living God*, is to be understood, acknowledging all those doctrines concerning him which the scheme of the Christian religion contained in the New Testament hath propounded as essential and necessary points of faith. Such are, the divinity of his nature; his miraculous birth; his dying to satisfy for the sins of the world; rising again for the justification of sinners; being exalted to God's right hand in heaven, and constituted Judge of the whole world at the last great day of account; together with those other particulars contained in that form of sound words to *which we were delivered* in our baptism. For all these refer to the nature or offices of Jesus, and are virtually contained in acknowledging him to be *the Christ, the Son of God*. And because all faith is to influence our lives, and to prove itself by practice, therefore by confessing Jesus to be such, is likewise meant the submitting ourselves to him as that Divinity and those offices require, and living in agreement to what we profess and believe.

2. Secondly, that this faith and confession, as I have described it, is the mark of the true church, and such a character as may distinguish those who are, from others who are not of the church. For the promises of our Lord being the only foundation of certainty we have to depend upon for the continuance of his church to the end of the world, he no doubt fulfils them so as that men may be convinced he keeps his word. It is reasonable indeed to presume, that after so many wise and mysterious methods made use of for establishing the truth, God will not suffer it to be absolutely suppressed and lost. This renders the preservation of the church probable, and highly so, but it does not give us any positive assurance of the thing. For, since every man is liable to be perverted from the truth, a society made up of such men cannot in the nature of the thing have any security that they shall not all be seduced, and fall away. So that our Lord's promise is the security given us in this case. And we therefore believe that Jesus shall always be publicly acknowledged to be *the Christ, the*

Son of the living God, because he hath solemnly engaged that thus it shall be.

In this the being of the church is preserved; this confession is its property, makes its essential difference, that wherein its safety, nay its very nature, consists. Wheresoever this confession is made, there is the church. And consequently, the pretences to being the true church are not to be tried by such fallible notes as numbers, or splendour, or visible succession in the same place, or any other outward distinctions of that kind; but by the sincerity of the professors, and their steadfast adherence to the saving truths of the gospel. Again, since every mark whereby a thing may be distinguished infers its being discernible itself, (otherwise it can never shew us the difference of other things to be tried by it,) hence we may conclude this confession of *Jesus to be the Christ and Son of God* will always be made in such a manner, that there ever was and will be a church which may be known to be the true, that is, a visible church of Christ, without interruption, so long as the world endures.

3. Thirdly, *the gates of hell*, when the words are thus applied, will most naturally signify those oppositions to the truth by which the free and constant profession of it is hindered and discouraged. And since this may be done two ways, either by drawing men off, and debauching their judgments with erroneous opinions destructive of the truth, or by deterring them from sticking to the truth, and owning what is their real opinion; therefore persecution and heresy are very fitly understood by these *gates of hell*. Thus is the malice and the subtlety of the devil principally employed; by the one, he labours to batter down the walls of this building upon a rock; by the other, to sap and undermine the foundation of it.

4. Fourthly, with regard to these the tenure of the promise is, that *they shall not prevail against it*: that is, no persecutions, how severe and barbarous soever, shall so far deter men from adhering to this religion, even in its most oppressed and afflicted state, that there should be no good men left who dare to own their principles in despite of threatenings and tortures and death. Many may fall away, many may be taken off for their constancy, but still a remnant shall escape: and however the seed upon the stony ground may wither and be scorched when the burning heat of tribulation arises, yet there will be some on the good ground to bring forth fruit with patience, and yield thirty, sixty, nay an hundredfold.

So again, new and dangerous doctrines may spring up and spread, and, like the tares in the field, shed their venom upon the wheat: but still the wheat shall stand till the harvest, and true believers shall always be found; free, if not from all error and corruption whatsoever, yet untainted with any that should make them cease to be a church. In a word, however men may differ in matters of less consequence, and how many soever may fall off from them, still things shall never come to that extremity that there should be an utter and total defection from the important truths of the gospel. So that the substance of my text thus interpreted, in short, is this, that, notwithstanding all the vain attempts of heretics and persecutors, there shall

always be some so constant and courageous as will dare to profess and teach, so orthodox as to hold and continue fully persuaded of the great and necessary doctrines of the Christian religion. And these Christians thus persuaded, thus professing, be they more or fewer, prosperous or afflicted, are the church in this promise, against which those *gates of hell* never did nor ever shall prevail.

It remains now that I draw some few inferences from this explanation of the words, and so conclude.

And first, from hence we learn what that church is to which the promise in my text belongs. The term *church* is of ambiguous signification, and therefore it must needs be of great consequence to fix a right notion of it, that we may not suspect the truth of our blessed Master, nor bring the punctual performance of this engagement into question by a wrong application of it. Sometimes *the church* signifies the elect, who are heirs of salvation by virtue of an inward effectual calling of the Holy Spirit: and because this inward operation of the Spirit is what we cannot discern, this is called *the invisible church*. Against this church *the gates of hell* do not prevail indeed: but the promise does not seem to be peculiar to them only; because it supposes some marks whereby we may discover who are and who are not the persons to whom it is made good.

Sometimes, again, *the church* signifies that company of men who live in the outward profession of the truth, and own the name of Christ, any where in the world. Now their doctrine and worship being open and observable, such as they may be taken notice of and distinguished by, this is, in that regard, called *the visible*, and in regard of its not being confined to any limited place, *the universal church*. Sometimes also the particular branches of this great body are called *churches*, as St. Paul mentions *the care of all the churches*, the church of Jerusalem, the church of Rome, of Corinth, of Ephesus, and the like. In this last sense it is manifest the promise is not meant. For those churches mentioned in Scripture having some of them revolted from the doctrine and worship of Christ, and being overrun with errors and heresies destructive of the first and fundamental articles of our faith, it is evident that *the gates of hell* have actually prevailed against them. So that the universal and visible church is plainly that society of persons concerned here. And so long as the Christian religion does not absolutely disappear, so long as there are any where men who continue to hold all the necessary and essential points implied in that confession of St. Peter, that *Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God*, so long the promise is made good still. The candle is not put out, though the candlestick may be removed from some *particular visible churches*, and translated out of one country or province into another.

2. Secondly, this promise does not infer that the church shall always continue in outward peace and splendour. We know at the beginning, after our Lord's resurrection, it was contained in that single upper room where the disciples assembled privately *for fear of the Jews*^d. And afterwards, during the primitive persecutions,

^d Acts i. John xx. 19.

it was only to be found in deserts and mountains and caves of the earth; among such persons who, to avoid the rage of their enemies, served God, not in temples and synagogues, but in such manner and places as the wisdom of the serpent, joined with the harmlessness of the dove, put them upon taking shelter in. Therefore the character of the church is not its being countenanced by human laws, and protected by the secular arm; it lies not in the multitude of its professors, nor the freedom of its worship, but in the truth of its doctrine, and the sincerity of its members.

3. Thirdly, it does not follow from hence that the church of God cannot err. For as men may be saved, though they be not absolutely void of all sin; so the church may continue a true church, though it be not totally exempted from all error. All men, as such, are subject to mistakes. But all mistakes do not overthrow the being of a church. Though therefore it should be granted that no society of men ever served God in perfect purity, yet so long as their corruptions did not overturn the main points of faith, so long as they held fast *the form of sound words*, and kept to the foundation, such errors and corruptions, in matters of less moment, are by no means inconsistent with this promise. For *the gates of hell have not prevailed* till error rides triumphant, and draws them all off from the belief and confession that *Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God*. From whence I argue,

4. Fourthly, that the holding communion with this or that particular set, or set of men, is no necessary qualification of the true church. For the truth of any church lies in the making that confession. And they who continue to hold this doctrine, as before explained, though they may see good cause to separate from some practices which they think by necessary consequence destructive of the faith, are yet truly members of Christ's church, let them hold outward communion with what Christian bishop they please, or any particular church whatsoever.

5. Fifthly, this promise may be of great comfort to us in these wicked and dangerous days, when heresy and profaneness, and all manner of impiety and shameless wickedness, so wretchedly abound. For though the case be bad, yet it is not desperate. God may try us, and suffer many to fall off; but he will vindicate himself and his honour. Error may spread, but it shall not prevail: some trouble his church may have, and great distress, but no interruption. And if our sins, which God forbid, should provoke him to let out this *vineyard to other husbandmen, who will give him the fruits in due season**, yet religion shall never be totally destroyed, nor can he suffer his truth to fail. But,

6. Lastly, this should be a warning to us to prepare for difficulties and trials, and resolve not to fall from our own steadfastness. The kingdom of Christ and that of the devil are described as two societies ever at war with one another. And therefore every one who hath listed himself under Christ's banner should provide for engaging every hour, and fight manfully against sin, the world, and the devil. We should all pray

most earnestly to God for the assistances of his grace; we should seek and love the truth; we should all *pursue the things that make for peace, and wherewith one may edify another*; we should hold fast to the church of which we are members, and not content ourselves with believing, but be sure to live up to what we are taught. Always remembering, that so long as we continue orthodox professors and holy livers, God will not suffer us to perish nor to err fatally; and that the only means to triumph, and obtain the crown of righteousness, is, *to live soberly, justly, and godly in this present world, and to continue Christ's faithful soldiers and servants unto our lives' end.*

ST. JAMES'S DAY.

A short Account of St. James the Apostle.

THERE needs but very little be added upon this occasion, after the many circumstances relating to it already delivered on the Gospel for St. John the Evangelist's day. He was (as hath been most probably believed) first instituted with his brother under the Baptism; and surnamed *Major*, either on account of his age, or to distinguish him from another apostle of the same name. It does not certainly appear how he disposed of himself after our Lord's ascension. St. Jerome* (or his interpolator) makes him to have preached to the Jews of the dispersion: but that his labours carried him at all out of Judæa, or even Jerusalem itself, no authentic history informs us. That his zeal was very industrious and ardent there, no other proof is necessary than Herod Agrippa's choice of him for the first sacrifice to the fury of the people. Which happening just upon his receiving the addition of Judæa to the dominions and regal titles conferred on him by Claudius the emperor, the true way of rendering himself popular and agreeable to the governing part of that nation was, to single out one whom his doctrine and the successes of it had distinguished, and rendered the principal mark of their malice and envy.

Eusebius^b, from Clemens of Alexandria's Institutions, (a piece now lost,) relates this remarkable passage; that the behaviour of St. James when brought before the tribunal was such as converted his accuser. And that he also, in the presence of the whole assembly, declared himself a Christian. Incensed at this, the court condemned him to death. In their way to the place of execution he desired St. James to pardon him. Who, after some pause, and fixing his eyes upon the man, kissed him, with these words, *Peace be unto thee!* and then they were both beheaded together. Thus did our blessed Lord not only verify to this apostle his promise that he should *drink of his cup, and be baptized with his baptism*, but in some sense grant his request of precedence in his kingdom too, in regard he had the honour to die first of all the twelve a martyr for the Christian cause.

* Catal. Script.

^b Hist. L. ii. c. 9.

THE COLLECT.

GRANT, O merciful God, that as thine holy apostle Saint James, leaving his father and all that he had, without delay was obedient unto the calling of thy Son Jesus Christ, and followed him^c; so we, forsaking all worldly and carnal affections, may be evermore ready to follow thy holy commandments; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

THE EPISTLE. Acts xi. 27 unto chap. xii. ver. 3.

27 *In these days came prophets from Jerusalem unto Antioch.*

28 *And there stood up one of them named Agabus, and signified by the spirit that there should be great dearth throughout all the world: which came to pass in the days of Claudius Cæsar.*

29 *Then the disciples, every man according to his ability, determined to send relief unto the brethren which dwelt in Judæa:*

30 *Which also they did, and sent it to the elders by the hands of Barnabas and Saul.*

xii. 1 *Now about that time Herod the king stretched forth his hands to vex certain of the church.*

2 *And he killed James the brother of John with the sword.*

3 *And because he saw it pleased the Jews, he proceeded further to take Peter also.*

This scripture having been paraphrased, and the matter contained in it been considered already^d, I proceed to the Gospel.

THE GOSPEL. St. Matt. xx. 20.

20 *Then came to him the mother of Zebedee's children with her sons, worshipping him, and desiring a certain thing of him.* 20. St. Mark makes this request to have been preferred by the two apostles themselves: either because they bore their mother company, or she asked it at their desire, Mark x. 35.

21 *And he said unto her, What wilt thou? She saith unto him, Grant that these my two sons may sit, the one on thy right hand, and the other on the left, in thy kingdom.* 21, 22, 23. See the Comment.

22 *But Jesus answered and said, Ye know not what ye ask. Are ye able to drink of the cup that I shall drink of, and to be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with? They say unto him, We are able.*

23 *And he saith unto them, Ye shall drink indeed of my cup, and be baptized*

^c Matt. iv. 21, 22. Mark i. 20.

^d See Epistle for St. Barnabas and St. Peter.

with the baptism that I am baptized with : but to sit on my right hand, and on my left, is not mine to give, but it shall be given to them for whom it is prepared of my Father.

24 *And when the ten heard it, they were moved with indignation against the two brethren.*

25 *But Jesus called them unto him, and said, Ye know that the princes of the Gentiles exercise dominion over them, and they that are great exercise authority upon them.*

26 *But it shall not be so among you : but whosoever will be great among you, let him be your minister ;*

27 *And whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant :*

28 *Even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many.* that of doing and suffering more for the other person whatsoever.

24. This gave offence to the ten apostles, who knew no reason why these two should pretend to higher honours than they.

25, 26, 27. That resentment our Lord sets himself to compose by two arguments. The one, taken from the different nature of his from that of the kingdoms of this world :

28. The other from his own example ; who sought no other preeminence than good of mankind than any

COMMENT.

THE Gospel for this day consists of two parts : a very inconsiderate request preferred to our blessed Saviour, and his answer to it. Of both which I shall at present discourse so far as the apostle now commemorated seems more especially concerned ; reserving the resentment of the other apostles, and what followed thereupon, (from the twenty-fourth verse to the end of this portion of Scripture,) to be considered hereafter.

Now here we are informed that the mother of Zehedee's children, together with her two sons, James and John, entertaining a very mistaken notion of Christ's kingdom, besought our Lord, that when he should enter upon it (which they seem to think would immediately follow his resurrection, foretold at the nineteenth verse) these two apostles might have the privilege of being next in honour to this King himself.

Such is the plain importance of that phrase, *sitting the one on his right hand, and the other on his left*. It being usual in the courts of this world to distinguish persons of authority by sitting in judgment, and access to the presence of the king. And among them again, to give place and precedence to those of the first rank and dignity by seating them nearest to the person of the prince. To this our blessed Lord replies, that *they knew not what they asked*^e. Their apprehensions (that is) of the kingdom of the Messiah, so often spoken of by the prophecies of old, were gross and low and carnal. For as his

^e Ver. 22.

kingdom was not of this world, so neither should the manners and advantages of it hold any such proportion or resemblance to those upon earth as they fondly imagined. Himself was not to acquire and possess this crown by wars and triumphs and common conquests; but by sufferings and shame, exceeding great hardships, and universal malice and contempt. And since his servants must follow his example, as well in the methods of obtaining honour, as in the nature of the honours appointed for their recompense, he inquires whether they were content and qualified to accept the advantage they ignorantly desired upon such hard conditions.

They, with a hasty zeal, natural to men eager in their wishes, and liberal in promising what great things they would do, answer, that they were ready to do and suffer any thing, and had not the least distrust of their own performance. Whereupon our Lord tells these bold undertakers they should be taken at their word, and in proportion to their making it good they should not fail to be considered for their pains and fidelity. *Jesus answered and said, Ye know not what ye ask. Are ye able to drink of the cup that I shall drink of, and to be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with? They say unto him, We are able. And he saith unto them, Ye shall drink indeed of my cup, and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with: but to sit on my right hand, and on my left, is not mine to give, but it shall be given to them for whom it is prepared of my Father^f.*

That such is the true purport of our Lord's reply, as I have already represented, will be yet more manifest if we proceed now to consider the terms in which it is expressed. Where it will be necessary to explain what is meant by *drinking of our Saviour's cup*, and *being baptized with the baptism that he is baptized with*.

For the former of these, we must observe that it was anciently the custom of great entertainments for the governor of the feast to appoint to each of his guests the kind and proportion of wine they should drink. In which he was so arbitrary and absolute, that all the company thought themselves obliged neither to call for any which was not thus distributed, nor to refuse or leave any behind which was brought thus by order. Hence a man's *cup* came to signify in general his lot and portion: and some philosophers have persuaded to this virtue of contentedness by representing God as the great Master of this common family, whose right it is to carve every man's proportion; and what rudeness it would be in the receiver to quarrel at his measure. This cup is used in Scripture sometimes for good, sometimes for evil and unpalatable accidents. In the former sense by David, when he describes the bounty of God by *his cup running over*^g; and the delight and happiness he found in his favour, by calling the Lord *the portion of his inheritance and of his cup*^h: in the latter, by the same psalmist, when he says of the wicked, that *the Lord shall rain upon them snares, fire and brimstone, storm and tempest: this shall be the portion of their cup*ⁱ: and threatens such with a *cup in the hand of the Lord, full of mixture*; and that they shall be forced to wring out the

^f Ver. 22, 23.^g Psalm xxiii. 5.^h Psalm xvi. 5.ⁱ Psalm xi. 6.

very drops of it, and drink them^k. And what our Saviour means by it in this place we cannot be to seek, since he hath been his own interpreter in two very remarkable passages upon the approach of his death. The one is that in the garden, where he prays the Father that, *if it were possible, that cup might pass from him; but if he must drink it, that his will might be done*^l. The other, that rebuke to Peter for attempting his rescue from the officers who had taken him into custody: *Put up thy sword into the sheath: the cup which my Father hath given me, shall I not drink it*^m?

The same is likewise the importance of the other figurative expression, *the baptism that I am baptized with*; agreeable exactly to that text in St. Lukeⁿ, *I have a baptism to be baptized with; and how am I straitened till it be accomplished*! Whether he chose to call his sufferings so, with an allusion to that resignation of a man's self to the will of God which every baptized person does in that act profess to make; or whether from that effect of purifying which his meritorious death was to have upon mankind; or whether in conformity to that usual metaphor of comparing troubles to *deep waters*^o; so that the ceremony of total immersion, practised in those hot countries at baptism, might shadow out the extremity of what he was about to endure: which of these reasons, I say, gave occasion for this metaphor, is, I think, no very material inquiry. For so long as the signification of the place is clear and uncontestable, the particular reason of this scheme of speech need give us no great trouble. And little doubt can be made but the true importance of the words is neither more nor less than this; that the sincerity and ability of these two apostles should be brought to the trial by Providence ordering matters so that they should be conformed to the example of their Master, and suffer bitter things for the honour and confirmation and great advantage of the Christian religion, as Jesus had done before them.

This prediction, or promise, call it which you will, was literally and punctually fulfilled in St. James, (to the honour of whose memory this festival is designed.) The Epistle for the day informing us, that when the malice of Herod had instigated him to vex certain of the church^p, the storm fell upon this eminent person particularly. And when that tyrant killed him with the sword, then did he in the highest sense of the words *drink of his Lord's cup, and was baptized with the same baptism that he had been baptized with*.

Concerning St. John, the other son of Zebedee concerned here, Scripture indeed is silent as to the manner of his death. But since this cup and baptism imply persecutions and afflictions even short of death, the same honour cannot be denied to St. John, who, as St. Luke informs us^q, was both *scourged and imprisoned* by the council at Jerusalem; and afterwards (as himself says) banished into the *isle of Patmos, for the word of God, and for the testimony of Jesus Christ*^r. Besides that ecclesiastical history mentions his being put into a caldron of hot oil, by the barbarity of the proconsul at Ephesus under Domitian^s. And certainly that man may with great justice be

^k Psalm lxxv. 8. ^l Luke xxii. 42. ^m John xviii. 11. ⁿ Luke xii. 50. ^o Psalm lxxx. 1, 2.

^p Acts xii. 1, 2.

^q Acts v. 18, 40.

^r Rev. i. 9.

^s Euseb. l. iii. c. 18.

esteemed a martyr, who hath undergone such tortures as nothing less than a miracle could have supported his life under or delivered him from.

Thus much shall suffice for explaining *the cup* and *the baptism* meant here. But it is of no less importance to be truly informed concerning another passage now before us; which is, how our Saviour meant that *sitting on his right and left hand was not his to give; but it should be given to them for whom it is prepared of the Father.*

In the close of the nineteenth chapter, to that question of St. Peter, *Behold, we have forsaken all, and followed thee; what shall we have therefore?* Jesus had returned this answer, *Verily I say unto you, That ye which have followed me, in the regeneration when the Son of man shall sit in the throne of his glory, ye also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.*^t This promise of preeminence made to the apostles in common did by no means satisfy the two sons of Zebedee. But their ambition led them to desire a preference above the rest of their brethren. Of this it is probable they conceived some hopes from the particular regard our Lord seems to have expressed for them, in giving them the privilege of attending him in his privacies. Thus he made them witnesses of his reviving the daughter of Jairus^u, of his glory at his transfiguration in the mount^x; and shortly after of his agonies, when he retired into the garden to pray, upon the approach of his passion^y. St. John is also styled, by way of eminence, *the disciple whom Jesus loved*^z; for which some have assigned this reason among others, that he was very nearly allied to him in blood. To all these grounds of confidence, which might encourage them to ask such precedence themselves, they add the intercession of their mother, hoping thus to strengthen their pretensions yet more. But still the answer is, *It is not mine to give, &c.*

The meaning whereof is by no means what some adversaries to the divinity of our blessed Saviour would infer from it, that to distribute rewards in the kingdom of glory is a prerogative peculiar to the Father alone, and such as no way belongs to the Son. For this Son is that very Lord whom St. Paul calls *the righteous Judge, that shall give a crown of righteousness to all that love his appearing*^a. He is that *King who shall separate the sheep from the goats, and reward every man according to his works*^b. But the design of this passage is to shew that those rewards shall not be distributed upon such considerations and in such manner as these petitioners vainly supposed. To which purpose we may take notice, that those words, *it shall be given to them*, are in a different character; which is a mark of their not being in the original, but a supplement of the translators only. So that the *sitting on the right hand and on the left*, the honours and degrees of happiness, are not the Son's to give in the sense the apostles fancied them: that is, he does not give them absolutely and arbitrarily; he is not led by partiality and fondness, or respect of persons; he is not carried by humour, or vanquished by the importunity of friends and suitors, as earthly princes are; but he is limited by the considerations

^t Matt. xix. 27, 28.

^u John xiii. 23.

^u Mark v. 37.

^a 2 Tim. iv. 8.

^x Matt. xvii. 1.

^y Matt. xxvi. 37.

^z Matt. xxvi. 37.

^b Matt. xxv. 31, &c. xvi. 27.

of equity and strict justice, from which it can never be consistent with the perfections of his nature to depart. This then is the purport of the words, *To sit on my right, and on my left, is not mine to give; but, or except, to them alone for whom it is prepared of my Father.* And since we are so perfectly assured, both from the nature of God and from express revelation, that *every man shall at the last day receive according to the things done in his body*; it follows, that these are prepared for those who do most to obtain them. That is, every Christian shall then be exalted to a higher degree of bliss and glory, in proportion as he hath drunk deeper of Christ's cup; as his humility, his obedience, his sufferings, his patience, and meek disposition, have brought him to a nearer conformity with his Master; so shall he be considered, and be placed nearest him in happiness.

And thus this answer explains and confirms the parable in the beginning of the chapter; where the labourers in the vineyard, whose work of one hour had expressed an equal diligence to theirs who were hired sooner, were in their pay likewise made equal to them who *had borne the burden and heat of the day.* The apostles and primitive Christians, they who had the advantage of conversing personally with Christ, or who actually laid down their lives for him, shall in no degree have the advantage of any other Christians, whose zeal and disposition, obedience and sufferings, have set them upon the same foot of fidelity and fervency, and undaunted love of him and his truth.

Thus much shall suffice to be spoken upon the words, so far as they relate to the case of these apostles themselves. But since the answer given to them in such general terms is what every servant of Jesus hath manifestly a concern in, the remainder of my discourse shall be spent in offering such reflections from it as may be of some service to us in the performance of our duty. And these are so many and so important, that I shall not need to be particular in all which the whole passage together might suggest to our profit, but will confine myself to a few only, which the words of our blessed Master minister occasion for.

I. And here, first of all, we may learn to form a right judgment concerning afflictions; and may convince ourselves how very wide from truth those opinions are, which conclude the calamities of this world to be certain marks of God's displeasure. How usual is it, when any uncommon disaster befalls a man, to imagine that such a one hath been guilty of some very heinous crime, which provoked God to take that opportunity of punishing and exposing him, after a manner as extraordinary as we fancy his offence! And even in the several dealings of Providence toward our own selves, nothing is more frequent than from thence to frame very false and fanciful ideas of our being objects of the Divine favour or displeasure. Now when I dissuade and condemn this manner of arguing, my meaning is not, that we are never to look upon afflictions as punishments sent from God to chastise sinners, and give seasonable warning to others. For this, it is very certain, it will becomes us to do. The strokes of this rod are designed to reclaim us; which cannot be otherwise done than by making us sensible wherein we have exceeded. The surprising events

and dismal revolutions in the fortunes of other men are so many loud awakening calls to avoid their vices, (where those vices are crying and scandalous.) And in general it is very certain that all adversity comes originally from sin. Nor could the Son of God have suffered as he did, had he not been *numbered among the transgressors*, and taken upon himself all the temporal inconveniences to which that guilt had rendered those persons obnoxious whose character he bore. Now since all men have sinned, all may in justice be afflicted. Therefore the utmost my present argument extends to is against concluding, not who are and who are not sinners, (for all are such,) but against determining rashly concerning the degrees of any man's guilt, or the condition of his soul with regard to the judgment of God and another world, from the measures of his misfortunes and sufferings here. And this, I say, we are extremely to blame and very liable to be mistaken in. This it were easy to shew upon other accounts: but there is one at hand, with which I shall content myself; and that is, our blessed Lord himself styling afflictions and injuries, and all manner of sufferings in good men, *drinking of his cup, and being baptized with the baptism that he was baptized with.*

It may perhaps be objected, that those expressions, which denote our Saviour's bitter death, may indeed be applied to such as lay down their lives for the service of God and the truth; but that they ought not to be extended to every sort of affliction and distress. And therefore, though this argument and the comforts of it may of right belong to martyrs, yet have not all good men under hard circumstances a title to them, nor may they say upon the account of bodily sorrows, or distresses in the affairs of the world, that they either drink of Christ's cup, or do any thing to qualify them for the brighter crown, by submitting to them.

Now in answer hereunto we are to observe what it is that God chiefly respects and rewards in martyrdom itself. It must be something wherein the virtue of that action consists. Now that cannot possibly be either the particular occasion upon which the man suffers, or the particular kind of his suffering, or the honour and advantage which accrues to religion by this means. The reason is, because these are things disposed of by Providence, and not in the man's own power. And that which is not in the person's power cannot denominate his action virtuous. It must therefore be the disposition of his mind; by which he prefers the glory of God and a good conscience before his own temporal safety and advantage. It is the meekness, the patience, the constancy with which he suffers. Consequently, whatever it be that ministers occasion for the exercise of these virtues, it makes no difference, provided the submission and self-denial be the same. It is sufficient that the cup be bitter, and that it be drunk with cheerfulness and content, though the particular ingredients which make that bitterness be not exactly the same. Sickness and pain and poverty are grievous to human nature; and these are equally the appointment of God toward us, as tortures and persecutions for the faith. And therefore these are capable of being equally considered, in that righteous judgment which distributes rewards, not according

to the quality of the hardships undergone, but in proportion to the temper and resignation of spirit with which men undergo them. Indeed were it otherwise, the blessing of peace and a free profession of the truth had been the unkindest dispensation which could possibly have happened to the church. Because upon these terms Christians had been quite cut out from all opportunities of drinking of their Lord's cup; and by rendering it impracticable to partake in his sufferings, Providence at the same time would have rendered it impossible to arrive at a participation of his recompense and of his glories.

The objection being thus removed, our argument is just; that as upon other accounts no inference can be drawn which shall generally conclude a man in disfavour with God because he is afflicted, so particularly not upon this account, because the most innocent, the most holy, and the best beloved person that ever lived was injured, oppressed, and barbarously treated in the days of his flesh, to a degree as much exceeding the sufferings of common men as his worth and dearness to Almighty God excels theirs. And therefore we may observe, that the sufferings which these two apostles were hereafter to undergo are not threatened in the quality of a punishment, but seem rather to be promised in the nature of a privilege. God is the master and judge of the race; he is the sole disposer of the prize: and since his original justice determines him to crown those who run best, all the favour he shews in this regard is properly that of furnishing men with proper occasions of exerting themselves, and putting them upon such trials as are most acceptable to him. Had misfortunes and hardships been evil in themselves, and necessary distinctions between good and bad men, they could not in the nature of the thing have fallen upon the best of men. Because the greatness of them would then have proved him a proportionably great sinner. And therefore, since his cup did not destroy his innocence, we ought not to think our own or other people's circumstances a sufficient mark to judge the state of their souls by. Rather, when the hand of God falls heavy upon us, let us look up with comfort to this great example. Not doubting but that as, according to the constitution of his allwise providence, it *behoved Christ to suffer*, and thus *to enter into his glory*, so we are then in the right and ready way to bliss and honour everlasting. And that the only danger lies, not in enduring, but in not enduring as he did. For if by our humbling and submitting ourselves we be brought to the likeness of his meek and patient dying, these severest exercises of our virtue are the effects of love and favour, our honour and our advantage, and the most effectual methods of transforming us into the likeness of his resurrection and triumphs in heaven.

2. Secondly, we have here a fair occasion given us of considering the reasonableness of suffering and self-denial being made the condition of a Christian's happiness; and of seeing that our Lord, in commanding all his disciples to *take up their cross and follow him*, hath imposed no more upon us than every considering man may find very sufficient arguments for submitting to. It must not be expected that I can at present enlarge upon all these motives as they deserve. And

therefore I shall content myself with mentioning two only; which if they be not set off in their full light and strength, will yet, I hope, by this short representation, answer the purpose I produce them for.

1. The first is the condition of human nature, and the unavoidable fate we lie under of suffering, in one kind or other, while we carry these bodies about us. *Man is born to trouble*, says the Scripture, *as the sparks fly upward*^c. That is, consider us as now we are, corrupt and sinful, and there is something as natural in our afflictions as it is in fire to ascend. For being thus compounded of warring principles, such as flesh and spirit, the one cannot prevail without some depression and violence to the other. And our happiness consisting in the predominance of the spiritual part, whatever promotes this must be uneasy to the sensual. As therefore our sins have provoked God to chastise us, and the constitution we are of renders all chastisement for the present not joyous, but grievous; so does the same constitution render it impossible for us either to pursue or to indulge, to deny or to subdue our lusts and worldly inclinations without pain and trouble. If poverty and infamy, if humility and temperance have their torment; so have riches and honours, pride and ambition and luxury their troubles too. Could we in any state of life attain to perfect happiness and quiet, more might be said to justify men's declining to close with religion upon the terms of present uneasiness. But since this awaits all men in all conditions, the question is not, whether we will suffer at all, (for suffering is our portion, and escape it we cannot,) but in what manner we will choose to suffer. Whether we will choose to be martyrs in the cause of our lusts and the service of the devil; or whether for truth and virtue, and in obedience to God. Whether we will make ourselves wretched while cares and vices rack us to death, and our better sense reproaches our folly; or whether we will choose some hardships for acting like reasonable men and enlightened Christians; while our own consciences and the commendations of all wise and good people support and applaud our choice. Whether we will dote upon these perishing bodies, and glory in our shame; or whether we rather shall love that part which is more truly ourselves; and by mortifying this outward shell of us, and exposing, if need be, our lives for the advantage of holiness and the preservation of our souls, take the most effectual method of saving body and soul both. This is the true state of the case in the present condition of mortality. A condition which admits no sincere and uninterrupted peace and pleasure; and leaves us no other choice but that of rendering our burden ignominious and unprofitable, or else reasonable and glorious, and such as, well and wisely borne, will turn to infinite account. For, which is yet more,

2. Secondly, we have a future and eternal reward to encourage us in these sufferings. Had men no prospect at all beyond the grave, yet even so, thus much might be said to shew the advantages of patience and self-denial; that religion, with all its hardships and encumbrances, is better suited to the dignity of a reasonable creature, and ought to be preferred far before the brutish and unthinking life of

sensual and worldly men. But when the present state comes to be considered as it really is, in the quality of a state of discipline and trial, that in which our proper happiness cannot be attained, and ought not to be expected; and when that happiness shall be proportioned hereafter to those proofs which men give of their virtue and fidelity and perseverance and Christian bravery here; this puts quite another face upon the matter, and casts the scale clearly on the side of religion. Immovable steadfastness is then our wisdom, in despite of all the difficulties and dangers this can possibly involve us in. For what comparison is there between perfect bliss, and those empty shadows of it with which this world beguiles and cheats us? between a moment and eternity? And sure men never love themselves so well as when they exercise that seeming cruelty of selling all, even body and life itself, to purchase this one pearl of great price. Sure God is never more kind than when he afflicts and calls us to suffering upon a good account; since in so doing he puts into our hands opportunities of securing to ourselves a brighter crown of glory, and nearer approaches to his own unspeakable felicities.

For (which is the last consideration I shall offer from the words) this declaration of God's impartial justice in distributing the honours and rewards of his heavenly kingdom intimates to us the infallible certainty of our happiness and high advancement there; provided we be not wanting to ourselves now in the improvement of his grace, and of the favourable occasions his providence offers to us. Among the many things that may be urged to beat down our esteem for the honours and advantages of this world, that is not the least, that they are scattered promiscuously, without a strict regard to the qualifications and deserts of the possessors. Birth and fortune and friends and importunity, and, which is still worse, flattery and fraud and sinful compliances, are very often the steps and instruments whereby men rise, and recommend themselves to the highest and most gainful promotions. And nothing is a more fatal check to industry and virtue than the very great uncertainty whether true merit shall ever be considered at all. Now here this best and most quickening spur to doing well is secured to us, that God will reward every man *according to his works*: nay, which is more, that he will reward the man's disposition, and the sincerity of his intentions and endeavours; though he may not have been able actually to accomplish all that he wished and laboured hard to do. In our great concern there shall be no respect of persons; so that every man's fortunes are (as it were) put into his own power, and he who fails of happiness hath none but himself to blame for it. Were this the case on earth, how would it quicken men's diligence! And shall our zeal be less when they strive for a corruptible crown than ours for an incorruptible! Oh no! let us (as the apostle of this day did) *follow Christ without delay, and forsaking all carnal and worldly affections, be evermore ready to obey his commandments*; and the prize shall be our own. And if he command us to *drink of his cup*, and to *be baptized with the baptism that he was baptized with*; yet even then let us contentedly and thankfully comply with that call; and looking up to the joy that is set before us, esteem

it a privilege to be conformed to the likeness of his sufferings. As knowing most assuredly, that if we continue *steadfast, immovable, and always abound in the work of the Lord*, we shall be considered accordingly, and no part of *our labour shall be in vain in the Lord*^d.

ST. BARTHOLOMEW'S DAY.

A short Account of St. Bartholomew.

THAT the first syllable of this apostle's name signifies a son, is evident from Bartimæus being interpreted the son of Timæus^a, and Simon Peter, who is called Bar-jona in one evangelist^b, called Simon son of Jonas in another^c. The name then here given to this apostle is not his proper, but patronymical name, and imports only the son of Tholomew, or Tolmai. That among the Jews there were persons so called is evident from Josephus^d, who mentions one such very notorious in his own time. So that we are still at a loss for his personal name, unless that conjecture may be thought sufficiently grounded, that this was indeed no other than Nathanael. To that purpose it is remarkable, first, that as no other evangelist makes mention of Nathanael, so neither does St. John, who mentions him, ever once make mention of Bartholomew. Secondly, that in the catalogue of the apostles, (the giving which is the only occasion of naming St. Bartholomew in the rest,) Philip and he are constantly coupled together; and those pairs are thought to join the persons as sent together *two by two* upon the power of miracles first committed to them^e. Very fit companions, supposing Nathanael the man; whom Philip, it is plain, had intimacy with, and was the first instrument of bringing to Jesus. Again; he is by St. John^f named in company with several other apostles, and so that we have reason to conclude him one of the twelve: for it is upon our Lord's shewing himself at the sea of Tiberias after his resurrection. This the evangelist declares to be *the third time* of his doing so. But the two former appearances are expressly recorded to be made to the eleven^g; the rest named here are of that number; the word *disciples*^h must in all reason be so restrained as to signify the same persons here as in the former accounts. Consequently, it is highly probable, I had almost said evident, that Nathanael was one of the twelve apostles. Which will be very hard to account for, otherwise than by taking the same person to be meant by St. John under Nathanael his proper name, and in the other Gospels under his patronymical of Bartholomew.

By our Lord's discourse and his, in the first of St. John, he seems to have been skilled in the law, and is thought by St. Augustine a doctor of itⁱ. His knowledge in this way was rightly employed; such as received a noble commendation of sincerity, returned acknowledg-

^d 1 Cor. xv. 58.

^a Mark x. 46.

^b Matt. xvi. 17.

^c John xxi. 25, 16, 17.

^d Antiq. l. xx. c. 1.

^e Matt. x. 3; Luke vi. 14; Mark vi. 17; John i. 45, &c.

^f John xxi. 2.

^g Ver. 14.

^h John xx. 19, 24, 28.

ⁱ Tract. in Joan. vii.

John l. 47—51.

ments of the Messiah becoming a man of that character, and was honoured with promises of future and more ample discoveries of our blessed Saviour's glories.

His preaching was employed in India, Lycaonia, and the greater Armenia. But in what order he travelled these countries is not agreed. The evidence of his being in India we have in Eusebius^k, who says that Pantænus of Alexandria, carried thither by his zeal to propagate the faith, found among the people St. Matthew's Gospel in Hebrew, left there by St. Bartholomew, and preserved with great care as a most valuable treasure. This India is by St. Jerome called *the Fortunate*, and by Socrates^m distinguished to be that lying next Ethiopia. Who adds, that in the distribution of the world among the apostles, this part fell to St. Bartholomew's lot. Some will have it that he came last to and finished his course in this country. Chrysostomⁿ calls him the instructor and civilizer of the Lycaonians. He is also said to have suffered with Philip at Hierapolis, under the rage of the people; but, escaping with life, to have taken care of burying his old friend's body there. St. Jerome is express^o that he died and was buried at Albanople, a city of the greater Armenia. And the lesson in the Roman Breviary says, that after having converted many in those parts, particularly Polymius the king and his wife, and proselyted twelve cities, the priests, enraged at his successes, incensed Astyages the king's brother so against him, that having got St. Bartholomew into his clutches, he had him flead, and then beheaded; others say crucified. Sufferings so exquisite render the Gospel for the day exceeding proper to be read when a saint expiring under them is commemorated.

THE COLLECT.

O ALMIGHTY and everlasting God, who didst give to thine apostle Bartholomew grace truly to believe and to preach thy Word; Grant, we beseech thee, unto thy Church, to love that Word which he believed, and both to preach and receive the same; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

THE EPISTLE. Acts v. 12.

12 *By the hands of the apostles were many signs and wonders wrought among the people; (and they were all with one accord in Solomon's porch.* 12. Insomuch that they assembled openly at the temple, without any molestation.

13 *And of the rest durst no man join himself to them: but the people magnified them.* 13. The twelve in the meanwhile being held in such veneration that none

of an inferior character presumed to consort with them.

14 *And believers were the more added to the Lord, multitudes both of men and women.)*

^k Hist. l. v. c. 10.

^l Hieron. Catal.

^m Hist. i. c. 19.

ⁿ Hom. in 12 Apost. Dr. Cave.

^o Catal. Script.

15 *Inasmuch that they brought forth the sick into the streets, and laid them on beds and couches, that at the least the shadow of Peter passing by might overshadow some of them.*

16 *There came also a multitude out of the cities round about unto Jerusalem, bringing sick folks, and them which were vexed with unclean spirits: and they were healed every one.*

COMMENT.

THE topic properly arising from hence is the efficacy of miracles to establish the authority of the workers, and convince the unbelieving. Which having been handled heretofore, my reader is referred to vol. i. p. 298, &c.

THE GOSPEL. Luke xxii. 24.

24 *And there was also a strife among them, which of them should be accounted the greatest.*

25 *And he said unto them, The kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them; and they that exercise authority upon them are called benefactors.*

26 *But ye shall not be so: but he that is greatest among you, let him be as the younger; and he that is chief, as he that doth serve.*

27 *For whether is greater, he that sitteth at meat, or he that serveth? is not he that sitteth at meat? but I am among you as he that serveth.*

28 *Ye are they which have continued with me in my temptations.*

29 *And I appoint unto you a kingdom, as my Father hath appointed unto me;*

30 *That ye may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom, and sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel.*

24—27. See the phrase on the Gospel for St. James's day.

28, 29, 30. See the Comment.

COMMENT.

THE contention between the apostles related in this Scripture, St. Matthew and St. Mark^p expressly declare to have been occasioned by that indignation they conceived against James and John requesting that they might sit the one on our Lord's right hand and the other on his left in his kingdom. The nature of which petition, and our blessed Saviour's answer to it, have been sufficiently explained and considered the last festival. Whether St. Luke have placed this

strife in the right time and order of things, or whether the apostles were more than once guilty of such weakness, are critical inquiries of no great importance, and beside the purpose of these practical discourses to enter into. Let it suffice to observe the agreement of all three evangelists thus far, that this dispute immediately followed upon warning given of our Lord's death, and his resurrection consequent thereupon. A plain confirmation of the remark I formerly made^a, that the apostles expected those events would be presently succeeded by Christ's solemn entrance upon some glorious exercise of a temporal dominion. A mistake which was then shewn to be in some degree refuted by our Lord's reply to the two sons of Zebedee: and it is designed to be yet more fully exposed by his discourse to the whole body, which falls under our present consideration.

Some interpreters have taken pains to acquaint us what reasons they imagine several of this number might find to feed their hopes of obtaining a preeminence above the rest of their brethren. St. Peter, they tell you, is not only mentioned first, but, upon his confessing *Jesus to be the Christ, the Son of the living God*, received the peculiar honour of this answer, *Blessed art thou, Simon Bar-jona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven. And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven*¹. St. James and John had been dignified with the title of *sons of thunder*²; had been equalled with Peter by the same admission to the privacies of their Master³; particularly at the raising of Jairus his daughter, and his glorious transfiguration in the mount⁴; as we find them again shortly after this at his agony in the garden⁵. Distinctions of favour which perhaps were made encouragements to that request mentioned even now. St. Andrew was first of the whole fraternity brought to the knowledge of Christ, and introduced his brother Peter to him. Matthew had quitted a very gainful employment for his service⁶. Thomas seems to have excelled the rest in courage; and when his Master, notwithstanding the representation they made of his danger, determined to return into Judaea, he exhorts them all to follow his fortunes, come what would; *Let us also go, that we may die with him*⁷. (For thus it seems to me reasonable to understand that passage, rather than spoken in a sense of fear and irony, as hath been argued before^b.) Simon the Canaanite and Judas Thaddæus^c might think this preference a natural effect of their near relation to Jesus in blood. And Bartholomew, by many supposed the same with Nathanael^d, on account of the high character given him, the promise made of seeing Christ's glory; to which some add the consideration of his being more learned in the law, and of greater quality, than the other apostles.

Such have been the conjectures (and no better than conjectures)

^a Gospel for St. James's day.

¹ Matt. xvi. 16—19.

² Mark iii. 17.

³ Ch. v. 37.

⁴ Matt. xvii. 1. ⁵ Ch. xxvi. 37.

⁶ John i. 37—43.

⁷ Matt. ix. 1.

^b John xii. 7—16.

^c See St. Thomas's day.

^d Matt. xiii. 55.

^e John i. 45—51.

advanced upon this occasion. But whether these or any other causes kindled their emulation, our blessed Lord does here give his apostles to understand, that neither their ideas of his kingdom, nor the expectations they had conceived thereupon, had any just ground in the nature of the thing. To which end he shews the difference between the preeminences in use and esteem with the generality of the world, and those peculiar to the gospel, and their character. And then he declares and describes the mighty honours reserved as a proper recompense for their service and fidelity to him. The former of these arguments is contained in the twenty-fifth, sixth, and seventh; the latter in the twenty-eighth, twenty-ninth, and thirtieth verses.

1. The words in which the former reason lies are these: *The kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them; and they that exercise authority upon them are called benefactors. But ye shall not be so: but he that is greatest among you, let him be as the younger; and he that is chief, as he that doth serve. For whether is greater, he that sitteth at meat, or he that serveth? is not he that sitteth at meat? but I am among you as he that serveth.*

Referring my reader for the sense of these words to that explanation given in a former paraphrase^c, I observe only, that the argument contained in them cannot by any means be what some have inferred from hence, viz. that it is inconsistent with the character and duty either of a Christian in general, or of an apostle or minister of Christ in particular, to bear rule or exercise authority over others. The forbidding this to Christians in general must have introduced confusion and endless calamities, by excluding those from power who are, upon their own principles, of all men best fitted and most likely to use it conscientiously and profitably. And we cannot imagine our Lord designed so great a mischief to the world, as to ordain that none of them should govern, who, if they act as they profess, must needs be such, that it were to be wished rather, and would certainly turn to best account, to have it lawful for none but them to govern.

Nor can our Lord's intention be to debar the apostles in particular, and their successors in that dignity, from all manner of jurisdiction over others. For it is plain from several passages in the New Testament that he did instate them in such powers as are signified by *the keys of the kingdom of heaven*, by *binding and loosing the sins of men*, and the like. It is abundantly notorious that they did not only exercise such powers in their own persons, but thought themselves bound to delegate them to others. And accordingly the Epistles furnish several directions for the execution of the charge so delegated; which had been the vainest caution in the world, supposing the writers to have no authority to give, and the persons written to, to have received no such commissions. Nay, this interpretation is evidently confuted by the very passage now in hand. For our Lord does here in the same breath declare he had *appointed* to these apostles a *kingdom*, as his Father had appointed unto him^d, and constituted them *judges* in that kingdom. Unless therefore we will deny that Christ himself is a King and a Judge, we must either allow those expressions

^c St. James's day.

^d Ver. 29.

to denote some power and authority derived from him to his apostles, or else we make one part of the argument urged here to stand in perfect contradiction to the other.

From hence it seems undeniably to follow, that the opposition between these apostles and the princes of the Gentiles does not properly consist in authority and no authority, but in the different nature and kind of their authority, and the different manner of exerting it. Our Saviour, when declaring before Pilate that his *kingdom is not of this world*, assigns that for a reason why his servants did not rescue him by fighting, as the subjects of other kings do when their governors are in danger. And in proportion as the apostles are like him, so are they more and more unlike to other princes. The power of these extends to the bodies and estates, but theirs is over the souls and consciences of men. The end of that is to establish temporal, but of this to secure eternal peace and happiness. The exercise of that is generally tyrannical and arbitrary: and though the persons possessed of it affect titles that speak public good, yet do they rather import what princes should be than what they really are; for the aim of those Gentiles was to gain ease and pomp and grandeur to themselves, at the infinite sufferings and expense of their people: but the exercise of the apostolic authority was to be conspicuous in humility and meekness, in universal charity, unwearied labours, and unparalleled condescensions; in forgoing and despising personal safety and advantage; in spending and being spent, to promote the common interest of those under their care; and in not disdaining to become servants to the meanest, for the sake and after the example of Jesus.

This I take to be the true state of our Lord's first argument. And thus it comes directly up to the point for checking that exorbitant ambition of the disciples, which, as was said before, was kindled and cherished in them by that vulgar error concerning the Messiah's kingdom; as if the distinctions of those that should be chief in it were to consist in all that gayety and splendour and proud greatness which the unbelieving world valued themselves upon.

2. I pass now to the second argument, which is designed to quiet the emulation of these apostles, by declaring, that although no such dominion was intended for their reward, as they fondly imagined, yet a reward their good services should not want, and that such as had both honour and pleasure to recommend it. *Ye (says Christ) are they which have continued with me in my temptations. And I appoint unto you a kingdom, as my Father hath appointed unto me; that ye may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom, and sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel*^b. To clear this point it will be expedient, first, to explain some expressions in this promise, and then to shew the weight of our Lord's reasoning in it.

First then, for explaining the terms in which this promise is delivered. I observe, that by *continuing with Christ in his temptations* are undoubtedly meant the several instances of these apostles' fidelity. Such as, adhering steadfastly to their Master, notwithstanding all the discouragements and difficulties they met with themselves, or saw him

^a John xviii. 36.

^b Luke xxii. 28, 29, 30.

exposed to; relinquishing the world for his sake; being content to trust their all with him; to undergo the same painful labours and long journeys, the same poverty and hard fare, the same malice and persecution, the same derision and contempt, which he did. Not taking distaste at any of those mysterious doctrines which some thought *hard sayings*, and, as St. John says, *walked no more after him*¹. Not betraying any of those defects in their temper which the parable of the sower describes in such hearers who, like the seed on stony ground, were of promising and hopeful beginnings, but brought no fruit to maturity; zealous and forward while matters went well, but as soon as tribulation arose, presently offended. In short, they are here commended for the virtues of sincerity and constancy, patience and perseverance.

Secondly, by Christ's *appointing to them a kingdom*, as his Father had appointed unto him, we are to understand not an equality, but only a likeness of promotion. God gave Jesus a name above every name²; so that none could come up to his degree of exaltation. *Sit on my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool*³, was the conferring of a dignity so excellent, that not any of the blessed angels themselves could aspire to it. Nor indeed could any other pretend to merit it but the Son; because none but he was in the form of God, and humbled himself notwithstanding to the form of a servant, and the death of the cross. But as God exalted this Son for his voluntary humiliation and sufferings, so he decreed that all who suffered with him should also reign with him; that they should partake of his glories who had been partakers of his hardships, and receive an elevation, in proportion to what they had done and suffered for his sake; though incomparably beneath his, because their actions and sufferings were incomparably, nay infinitely beneath his. This difference is here expressed, in that Christ assumes to himself the prerogative of distributing the rewards and advancements which the rest should receive. He, as God, had a kingdom from everlasting; and, as man, he had a regal power invested in his human nature: they should be kings and priests to God and his Father too; yet not supreme and paramount, as he was; but kings of his making, and by virtue of his blood and merits that sits upon the throne.

Thirdly, the description of this kingdom does likewise deserve to be carefully considered. For by *eating and drinking at his table*, we must not imagine any gross feasts, or gratifications of a fleshly appetite. But because, while we continue in these bodies, and lead lives of sense, it is not easy for us to apprehend things purely spiritual, therefore resemblances of sense are made use of to convey to our understandings the ideas of things above us by those which bear some proportion to us. Thus the plague of heat and thirst is used to describe the torments of the rich glutton in hell, and the sad condition of a wretch who with such vehemence implored a drop of water to cool his tongue⁴. Thus the saints are said *not to hunger nor thirst any more*⁵; and those who come in to the gospel, *to eat bread with the holy patriarchs in the*

¹ John vi. 60, 66.² Phil. ii. 9, 10.³ Heb. i. 13.⁴ Luke xvi. 24.⁵ Rev. vii. 16.

kingdom of God. In like manner these words here intimate a condition of plenty and pleasure, where nothing that can contribute to true happiness shall be wanting, but all that ease and abundance and delicious enjoyment had which answers to the condition of men that live and eat with princes, and partake of all their state and entertainment.

What the importance of that other part is, wherein these apostles are said to *sit on thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel*, interpreters do not so generally agree. Some have thought their authority in the church militant upon earth to be meant by it. Of which I had occasion to speak before. Others, and most indeed, understand it of honours to be conferred upon them in a future state. And here some have taken great pains to determine what judgment these persons shall pass, that they shall condemn the errors of wicked men by their doctrines, the malice and obstinacy of infidels by their persecutions, and the like. Others have undertaken to assign them their parts in the appearance and process of the great day of judgment; and represented them as so many assistants to Christ, like the bench, in our courts of judicature, to the judge in commission. So construing their privilege here literally, that they shall sit upon the examination and trial of mankind, and all the rest stand at the bar as prisoners upon their deliverance. But though we are well assured that such a judgment shall be, yet as to the particular circumstances and formalities of it the Scripture seems to give us but a very slender insight. So that, setting all the dark conjectures about this matter aside, the most safe and probable way (in my apprehension) of applying this passage is to look upon it as spoken after the manner of men, to signify in general a brighter crown, and more exquisite degrees of happiness and glory. As those in princes' courts are most highly honoured who are allowed to sit down with them at their own tables, and are in the chief places of trust under and most eminent posts about them. These persons accompanied and owned and stuck close to Christ in his lowest estate; they kept the faith when there were the greatest temptations to draw them off from it; they were indefatigably diligent, undauntedly constant, in their labours and sufferings for the truth, and most eminently serviceable in advancing the kingdom of Christ upon earth; and therefore they shall receive an eminent distinction in his kingdom in heaven. This is what the words undoubtedly denote, even in the notion of those who contend for a strict interpretation of them. And this is enough for the present purpose, and avoids any inconveniences which might be charged upon a construction which the Scripture does not seem to have given any sufficient warrant, or at least any necessity for. The preeminence of the apostles however, which I contend for, is manifest in both acceptations. For if they shall actually have their thrones, and assist in that great work, this is a signal preference; and if the thrones, and the sitting here, be metaphorical, as the table and the eating and drinking are before, even thus a very remarkable prerogative is acknowledged to belong to them also.

The words of the promise being thus explained, it is fit: I now apply myself to shew that this argument used by our Saviour is a very fit one for his design; which was, to check that vain ambition of his disciples, and bring them off from their fondness of such worldly promotions and advantages as they falsely conceived and hoped would shortly be bestowed upon them. Now this he does these three ways:

1. First, by putting them in mind of the manner of life they had led together, a life of *temptations*; that is, of great adversity and severe trials. And this might, if duly attended to, convince them that the kingdom they were to partake of could not possibly be like those of this world. For every wise master takes care to initiate and prepare those under his direction for the several posts they are designed to fill. The great and honourable are accustomed to courts and august appearances; let into secrets of state, and taught the arts of government betimes, by conversing with and rendering greatness familiar. Thus they may rise to and be qualified for it by degrees, and not grow giddy with the surprise of a sudden advancement, nor betray their rawness and ignorance when invested with honours they know not how to manage. But how mighty distant from this was the method Christ took with himself and his disciples! He chose most of them from mean employments, and sought not to improve them with those of a higher rank. They led lives of solitude and privacy, except when the business of preaching and doing miracles called for their appearance in public; and then the entertainment they met with was commonly opposition and scorn. The whole of their practice was to endure and to harden themselves against any severe encounters which their faith might be engaged in. The principle upon which they were taught to perfect themselves was that of patience and meekness. To the poverty of their fortunes they were taught to add that of their spirits too; to forbear and despise the pomps and vain delights of the world; and take no joy in anything equal to that which sprung from being persecuted and spitefully used, reviled and defamed falsely for the sake of God and goodness. Resisting unto blood, and laying down their lives, being led as lambs to the slaughter, and dumb all the while, as sheep before the shearers, were dispositions exceeding contrary to those which secular princes are instituted to. And as foreign as these are from the arms and war and garments rolled in the blood of those which contend with us, so far were the victories and the triumphs and the crowns of Christ and his followers from the laurels and trophies of them, whose business and glory it is to defend or to enlarge their territories, and subdue all opposition, by dint of sword and revenge. By all the instruction, therefore, and all the exercise these disciples received under their Master, it might, one would imagine, have easily been discerned that the adversaries against whom they were trained are of another kind. The passions and the weaknesses of their own minds, and the malice and perverseness of other people's. And therefore the reward and advancement to be expected, consequent to such an institution, must have been somewhat spiritual and future. For it could not consist in any thing of this world; the contempt and abandoning whereof was

so eminent a branch of their duty; and the perpetual adversities and persecutions they engaged with in it, an expedient so purposely designed to wean their affections from it, and teach them to place their hearts and desires on a better state. And in this sense we may understand our Lord, when he says, *he appoints them a kingdom, as his Father had appointed unto him*; that is, he ordained that they should attain it by the same methods of trials and sufferings, of which they had already seen him encounter a great deal, and would now immediately be eyewitnesses of his enduring infinitely more; even at his passion, and agonies, and ignominy, and death, which at that instant, when he spoke these words, were drawing on apace to attack him. Now what could be more proper to compose the contentions about precedence than this; that there was no manner of occasion for any such disputes in their present circumstances; and that their fortunes and affairs in the world were, and would be, such, that afflictions and calamities ought rather to employ their thoughts, than honours, or any secular advantages? And if a strife must grow among them, the only seasonable subject of it was, not who should rise highest, but who should endure most indignities; which should lay himself out for the good of others with greatest zeal, and suffer with the greatest resignation and most invincible patience.

2. Secondly, by saying that he *appointed unto them a kingdom, as his Father had appointed unto him*, he intimated to them that their happiness should be of the same kind with his. And this is another motive to peace, and ceasing all strife about superiority. For our Saviour had given many instances in his life to manifest the truth of what he afterwards told Pilate, that his *kingdom is not of this world*. When the multitudes who had been miraculously fed in the wilderness would have acknowledged him as their leader, and desired he would take the regal honour upon him, he industriously avoided it. And when two brothers, at difference about an estate, desired him to interpose and determine their controversy, he declined all pretensions to the quality of a ruler or a judge over them. When a treacherous disciple had betrayed him into the hands of those bloody wretches who impiously besought his life, he reprov'd the forward zeal of a servant that attempted to rescue him; nor could he, as it is the custom and duty of temporal princes, suffer his friends to fight for him. Legions indeed he had, but they were legions of angels; and his territories are those glorious regions above, where blessed and immortal spirits dwell. This was the principality God had prepared for his Son. And sure what the only begotten and best beloved was destined to, his servants had reason not only to be content with, but to prefer before all other promotions whatsoever. It was enough in this case that *the servant should be as his Lord, and the disciple as his Master*. If the honours and pleasures of a lower world were not set apart for the encouragement and reward of such fidelity, the reason is, that they were not worthy his and his friends' acceptance, and that God had provided some better thing for them. Honour before the Majesty of heaven, stable and certain; instead of that fleeting shadow,

that blast of popular breath, that mushroom which comes up and dies in a night; which is often given, and as often taken away, without reason or desert; falls upon good and bad promiscuously; and, after a short glittering splendour, sets, and dies in hatred and disgrace. A crown, without the thorny cares that all earthly ones are beset with; not subject to change or decay, but above even mortality itself. A range of happiness vast and unbounded; such as fills the largest heart, and even exceeds the imaginations and wishes of them that labour after it. A condition of tranquillity so absolute, of love and joy so generous and great, that every soul delights itself with the felicities of others, and counts them an addition to his own. So that no place is left for ambition or emulation; no envious or greedy passions inhabit there: and they who look up to this bliss will be very far from grudging any of the difficulties undergone for the attainment of it; will esteem whatever earth contains or can propose, a trifle in comparison; will find no temptation to strive for greatness there, since no one's abundance shall create another's want, but all shall abound, and all be greater than they now can ask or think.

3. But thirdly, though all shall abound, yet we are not from thence to conclude all shall have an equal portion. And for this reason, what our Lord adds in the thirtieth verse tends thus far to the satisfaction of the apostles' thirst for honour, that there shall be a difference of honour and happiness in that spiritual and eternal kingdom; and that the highest room was reserved for them. So then a superiority and precedence there will be, though not such as one as their yet carnal understandings had formed ideas of. It is true indeed, the lowest place in heaven is prodigiously above the merits of the purest saint; but yet such is the mercy and bounty of God, that he does not only bestow upon every one more than he deserves, but observes a proportion even in the excesses of his goodness; and to those who labour more abundantly, and make a larger improvement of the talents committed to their trust, he assigns a more plentiful recompense. The character of a righteous judge is, not only to punish the evil and reward the good, but to assign a sorer punishment to those who have offended more grievously, and a better reward to them that have been more faithful and diligent. And when we are told that every man shall receive from Christ's tribunal *according to what he hath done in his body, whether it be good or bad*^s, it is very agreeable to reason to interpret that passage, not only that they who have done good shall receive good, but that they shall receive *according to what they have done*; that is, the degree of their happiness shall be increased or diminished in correspondence to the degree of the good they have wrought or the evils they have suffered for the sake of God and their duty. So likewise St. Paul tells the Corinthians that *he which soweth sparingly shall reap also sparingly; and he which soweth bountifully shall reap also bountifully*^t. From whence it follows that God is not unrighteous. He forgets not any man's least labours: all shall reap who have sown; but all shall not reap alike, because all did not

sow alike. And therefore the quantity of the crop at this harvest will depend upon the liberality of him who scatters the seed.

There is yet another passage commonly insisted upon to this purpose, that whereas good persons for the generality are promised that they shall be with the spirits of the just men made perfect, and sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and the like; those patriarchs and prophets are said to sit down with Christ at his own table in his kingdom. All shall see God, and in that beatific vision consists their happiness: but all shall not have so near, so full a prospect of him, nor be equally ravished with that prospect. All shall be crowned: but every crown shall not be equally bright; though every crown shall be a crown of glory, and every one immortal. And the signifying this to the apostles was very fit to quiet their present emulation, to excite their zeal and vigilance, and to render them easy and content with their cares and their sufferings; when they were thus assured that none of these things should pass unregarded; and that the only way not to be behind any of the others was *to labour more abundantly than they all*. The advice then given them in the words immediately foregoing was the most gainful method, the readiest and surest way of acquiring honour in Christ's kingdom, *He that is greatest among you, let him be as the younger; and he that is chief, as he that doth serve*.

The sum of our blessed Lord's argument, to check his disciples' ambitious emulation, turns (you see) upon these three points: (1.) That it was a most absurd expectation to imagine that any thing so contrary to their institution and whole method of life as worldly greatness was, should be the happiness intended for them. (2.) That a happiness however was reserved for their reward, and that of the very same nature with their Master's, the Son of God himself; such as they should be highly satisfied with, and find no occasion to envy or strive with any other for priority there. (3.) Yet, that some priority there was, and whosoever among them exceeded in diligence and humility and condescension in doing good and enduring evil for Christ's sake, and in pursuance of their office in propagating the gospel, should find a due respect had to his pains and faithfulness, and be preferred in the kingdom of heaven accordingly.

And now, after having insisted thus long upon the meaning and importance of these words with regard to the case of those contending apostles, I shall very briefly mention some reflections fit to be drawn from hence, and such as suit the circumstances of men in general.

I. As first, since the temptations mentioned in my text were poverty, shame, danger, and other kinds of adversity, it may be of use to observe how well the ends of religion are served by such providences. For they render men's virtue more conspicuous, their patience and constancy and trust in God more approved; and especially they vindicate their sincerity from that insinuation of the devil against Job, and the too common jealousy of wicked men, that God is served only for the sake of temporal interest. When adversity falls upon pious people, it shews them to themselves and to others. It gives them the satisfaction of knowing their own steadfastness; and convinces the unbelieving world that there is really such a thing as

cleaving to God out of a principle of duty and conscience ; that some can abstract from all those advantages and encouragements, for which Christians are often suspected to have a greater regard to the gain than to the godliness of their obedience.

2. But secondly, we ought to observe likewise what proof is given of our integrity in such cases, and upon what terms any benefit is to be expected from them. Which is only upon condition of our *continuing* with Christ in these *temptations*. Perseverance and faithfulness unto the end, not fainting under tribulation, not growing weary of well-doing ; these are the terms, these are the evidences of our virtue, to which a crown of life and righteousness is promised. The Galatians *ran well once*, but *they suffered themselves to be hindered from the obeying of the truth*^a ; but he that wins the prize must run on till he reach the goal. Several others addressed to Christ, and kept him company for a while ; but they forsook him again ; and the commendation here distinguishes these apostles from such a levity as those deserters were guilty of. We cannot indeed continue with Christ at this day in the same manner they did then ; because we do not converse with him as they did, nor see the abuses he suffered in our flesh. But we do continue with him in temptation, as oft as any difficulty besets us, but cannot draw us off from our duty, as oft as any misfortune assaults, but cannot vanquish our hope and patience ; as oft as we see his holy doctrine traduced and vilified, his blessed name profaned, his precepts neglected, his promises and threatenings slighted and ridiculed, and yet slacken not our zeal one whit, nor are in any degree ashamed of being esteemed those simple honest men which the gospel calls *Christians*. For it is a very commendable instance of our piety not to be seduced by example, nor borne down with the torrent of a common vogue. To hazard the reproaches of being singular and precise, rather than sacrifice our conscience to a false reputation, or join in a fashionable contempt of religion. And happy are those men who can make David's profession, *The proud have had me exceedingly in derision, yet have I not shrunk from thy law*^x.

3. Thirdly, if we consider the persons to whom and the time when these words were spoken, there is yet this further comfort to be gathered out of them, that God hath great compassion upon our weakness ; and does not reckon a good man's perseverance lost and broken by any interruption which human frailty and a surprising occasion may make in it. For did not our Lord deliver himself in these words a little before his passion ? Did not every one of these apostles forsake him ? Did not one of them deny him in few hours after ? Did he not know, nay, had he not already foretold, this scattering and offence because of him ? Yet you see, all this notwithstanding, he allows these very persons the character of *friends*, that *continued with him in his temptations*, and promises a reward for their courage and constancy in so doing. From whence now we have leave to argue that God does not shew himself extreme to mark what is done amiss, but sets a just distinction between failings and faults. That some calamities, when sudden and violent, may put us beside our duty, and

^a Gal. v. 7.^x Psalm cxix. 51.

prevail too far upon our passions, without the utter ruin of our souls, or forfeiting the praise due to our former piety. And provided we be diligent in calling back reason and religion to our assistance, that we return as soon as possible to a right mind, and do well and lament our offence, all may be very well. For to those who do not transgress wilfully, nor indulge their passions till they grow into voluntary and presumptuous sins, the slips of mere infirmity shall never be imputed to their prejudice.

4. Lastly, the subject before us teaches us to despise this world and to long for a better. This, you see, is not the place of rewards; it hath nothing in it capable of being a reward worthy the sufferings and obedience of a good Christian; nothing that can satisfy the desires of a truly great soul. If therefore we would indulge a lawful and commendable ambition, let us seek that honour which cometh from God only, and endeavour to be such whom the King of heaven may delight to prefer. If we thirst after plenty and pleasure, none of the trifles here below can satiate our appetite. It must be sincere and lasting pleasure, it must be true and stable honour: and such is only to be had in that kingdom which Christ appoints to all them who continue faithful in *temptations*. Which God grant us all grace to do here, that we may have glory for it hereafter. Amen.

ST. MATTHEW'S DAY.

A short Account of St. Matthew.

THAT this apostle descended from Jewish parents, there can be no manner of reason to doubt, supposing him, as has been generally believed, to be the same with that Levi the son of Alphæus whom St. Mark in the second and St. Luke in the fifth of his Gospel make mention of. The custom of having more names than one is known to have prevailed among the Jews; and the circumstances of the account given by those evangelists^a carry so exact an agreement with the Gospel of this day, as will not suffer us; I think, to understand them of different actions and persons. An ancient writer makes the place of his birth to have been Nazareth, and derives his parents from the tribe of Issachar. However that be, his employment we know was a publican. Concerning which office, the corruption it was generally exercised with, and the great disrepute it fell under upon that account, enough hath been said formerly^b. Meanwhile, this presents us with an instance of charity in the writers of the other Gospels; who, to cover the infamy of this their brother's former way of life, seem industriously to have declined all mention of his business before the call to the apostleship, and to have chosen to speak of him under his other name. It gives us also an evidence of his own great humility, who, in the Gospel written by himself, does not only take the more commonly known name of Matthew, but adds that odious and despised title of *Matthew the pub-*

^a Mark ii. 14, 17. Luke v. 27, 31.

^b Gospel for the Eleventh Sunday after Trinity.

hican^c. By this, no question, he intended to magnify the grace of God, and the condescension of our blessed Saviour, who did not only admit to his conversation and the means of repentance, but disdained not to take into the highest dignities of the Christian church, those whom the world accounted most vile, when they were qualified for such distinguishing marks of favour by being vile in their own esteem.

That he lived in circumstances of plenty may be reasonably presumed, not only from the exorbitant gains usually made of the publican's office, but from the greatness of the entertainment and the number of the guests wherewith our Lord was received at his house immediately after his call. And yet this wealth, and all the prospects of more, were no obstructions to quitting all secular advantages, and following the person and fortunes of a Master who made no scruple of declaring that he *had not where to lay his head*^d. So sudden and powerful are the changes wrought in men's hearts when effectually touched by Divine grace: but withal so rational, and free from all just imputation of rashness and enthusiasm, was the compliance of this apostle, when it is considered, that his abode and business lying at Capernaum, the fame of our Lord's miracles done there in great abundance, and particularly that famous one upon the paralytic just before^e, must needs have been a good preparation toward it with any attentive and unprejudiced mind.

He continued with our Lord during his abode upon earth; and after his ascension preached the gospel in Judæa for about the space of eight years. Then it was, as Eusebius thinks^f, that, intending to betake himself to the conversion of the Gentiles, he did, at the request of the Jewish converts, write the Gospel we now have under his name. And to make it more useful to them at whose instance he did so, the original language of it was Hebrew. To what hand we owe the Greek version is not so universally agreed. Some ascribe it to St. John, others to St. James the brother of our Lord, and first bishop of Jerusalem. Which conjecture if true, renders the inspired translator of equal authority with the first author. That this Gospel was written long before the other three, is out of question: and how valuable a treasure and authentic an account of our Lord's actions and doctrine it was esteemed, the reader could not but observe from the account given of St. Bartholomew; whose carrying this book with him into foreign countries, as the standard of the Christian doctrine, is thought by some to have been an act of respect, practised by all the apostles, when distributing themselves for the propagation of the faith through the several parts of the world. The countries in which he chiefly preached are said to be Parthia and Ethiopia; the latter of which is expressly said by Socrates the historian^g to have been St. Matthew's lot when the apostles had their respective provinces assigned to them. In all these places he signalized himself by a life of exemplary abstinence. And at Nadaber, a city in Ethiopia, he is most probably thought at last to have suffered martyrdom^h. But of the time and manner of his death no certain account is transmitted to us.

^c Ch. ix. q. x. 3.

^d Luke ix. 58.

^e Matt. ix. 2, 8.

^f Euseb. Hist. l. iii.

c. 24, 39; l. v. c. 8, 10; l. vi. c. 25. Hieron. Catal. Script. Iren. l. iii. c. 1. ^g Lib. l. c. 19.

^h Clem. Alex. l. ii. c. 1. Dr. Cave from Ven. Fort.

THE COLLECT.

O ALMIGHTY GOD, who by thy blessed Son didst call Matthew from the receipt of custom to be an apostle and evangelist¹; Grant us grace to forsake all covetous desires, and inordinate love of riches, and to follow the same thy Son Jesus Christ, who liveth and reigneth with thee and the Holy Ghost, one God, world without end. Amen.

THE EPISTLE. 2 Cor. iv. 1.

1 *Therefore seeing we have this ministry, as we have received mercy, we faint not ;* 1. Since God hath appointed us ministers of this better dispensation, we, in a due sense of the mercy, execute our office with diligence and courage.

2 *But have renounced the hidden things of dishonesty, not walking in craftiness, nor handling the word of God deceitfully ; but by manifestation of the truth commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God.* 2. And with all possible integrity too ; not stooping to any unlawful art, or fraud, or sinful accommodation, to ease ourselves or gratify others ; but by delivering

the gospel as it really is, and as becomes and accountable to the judgment of God.

3 *But if our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost :* 3. And if the force of this doctrine be at any time lost, it is not from want of any advantage or excellence fit to recommend it,

4 *In whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them.* 4. But from want of a good disposition to receive it in them whose wilful, God hath punished with a judicial blindness, by permitting

the temptations of worldly interests and carnal lusts to keep their minds still dark : so that they perceive not the excellence of this doctrine, nor of Jesus Christ its author ; in and by whom the glorious perfections of God the Father are exhibited to mankind.

5 *For we preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord ; and ourselves your servants for Jesus' sake.* 5. For he alone is the subject we preach ; and the knowledge of him the end

we aim at. Not any honour or profit of our own ; who are so far from exalting ourselves above the persons we preach to, that we think no kind office which may do them good too mean to submit to, for the sake of their and our common Master and Saviour.

6 *For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.* 6. And in this again we of the new resemble Moses the minister of the former dispensation ; that the same God, who in the beginning did with a word bring light out of darkness,

¹ Matt. ix. 9 ; Mark ii. 14 ; Luke v. 27, 28.

hath by his eternal Word Jesus Christ produced spiritual light in the minds of men: for he hath commanded the glory of his Son, resting upon and reflecting from us his apostles and ministers, so to shine on our hearers, as the glory of the Lord heretofore first left a lustre on the face of Moses, and from thence was reflected down upon the people.

COMMENT.

THE designs inspired by avarice and ambition are seldom so successful, never so wicked and dangerous, as when hypocrisy and a pretended zeal for religion are the instruments to cover and promote them. The management in these cases is sometimes so artful, that truth itself is made to lead the way to error, and the gospel of peace abused to purposes of faction and division. Hence St. Paul complains to the Philippians¹, that as some *preached Christ* from a principle of *love and good will*, so there wanted not others who preached him *not sincerely*, but *out of contention and envy and strife*. The joy he professes there to take in Christ being preached, however, *whether in pretence or in truth*, is to me a sufficient intimation, that how blameworthy soever the design of such preachers might be who supposed thus to *add affliction to his bonds*, yet the matter by them delivered was orthodox. For surely no consideration could have rendered the propagating false and dangerous doctrines, though mingled and set off with plain and profitable truths, just occasion of joy to so judicious and so zealous an apostle.

The different treatment of those adversaries who set up as teachers in the church of Corinth argues the case here to have been far otherwise. He charges them with advancing doctrines which would not *abide the trial*¹, and such as the most innocent and best intentions would but just leave a possibility for the author's escape from condemnation for maintaining: he compares their superstitions and absurdities to *wood and hay and stubble*; such as, though they did not destroy, were yet far from adding either beauty or strength to, or being at all of a piece with, the good *foundation* they were built upon. He threatens not only them but their abettors with the spiritual *rod*², in case they persisted in their faction, and refused to hearken to the instructions sent by Timothy. And in this Second Epistle he signifies to us the nature of those doctrines, and the qualities and behaviour of their teachers. The former in the third chapter; where his comparison of the law and gospel, and the mighty preeminences ascribed to the latter, are evidently levelled against the magnifiers of the Mosaic institution. The latter in the passage now before us; where, by a figure usual in rhetoric, he obliquely taxes his adversaries of those crimes and indirect practices, from which he only expresses a vindication of himself and his fellow-labourers in the truth. For such an edge as this upon the scandalous and licentious, the subtle and fraudulent, the inveighing and popular measures of schismatical preachers, the second verse appears to carry with it, when saying, *We have renounced the hidden things of dishonesty, not walking in crafti-*

¹ Phil. i. 15—18.¹ 1 Cor. iii. 12—15.² 1 Cor. iv. 17—11.

ness, nor handling the word of God deceitfully; but by manifestation of the truth commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God.

Abstracting from the charge of corruption and fraud thus laid upon his adversaries, the substance of what the apostle alleges for himself and his fellow-labourers in the gospel amounts to thus much; 1. that the doctrines by them advanced, and the method of inculcating these doctrines, were such as had a natural tendency, and must in the reason of the thing be effectual, to convince men of the truth, and persuade them to the practice of the Christian religion. And, 2. that whensoever it should (as in many instances it did) happen that their hearers were not actually so convinced and persuaded, this inefficacy could not be justly imputed either to want of force in the arguments urged for that purpose, or to any defects or mismanagements in the persons urging them, but proceeded from the faults and indispositions of those hearers themselves.

Of these two points the scripture now under consideration does plainly consist. A scripture very properly taken into the offices of this festival; which commemorates that apostle and evangelist to whose holy labours the church is indebted for the earliest account she now enjoys of our blessed Saviour's actions and discourses. A scripture equally applicable to him and the succeeding writers and preachers of the gospel in its primitive purity, as to St. Paul and his companions. And therefore it is now especially seasonable to observe, first, what evidences and motives they have left us for our common Christianity: and then, secondly, how it comes to pass that these do not always operate upon the minds of men as it is but reasonable to expect they should do. The former of these particulars will be of service for confirming us in our own duty: the latter will help us to account for other people failing in theirs.

In speaking to the former, which seems to be meant by the apostles *commending themselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God by manifestation of the truth*, we will briefly take a view of two things:

1. The nature and condition of the truth so manifested; and,
2. The manner chosen to manifest it by.

Truth here must be extended to the whole of that doctrine which the apostles, by our Lord's command and after his example, thought themselves bound to impart to mankind as necessary to their salvation. And because this was compounded partly of things to be believed, and partly of things to be done, (but these latter to be done in consequence of those former being believed;) therefore the manner of manifesting this truth must be justified by proving that they who undertook this mighty work were careful so to propound the articles of faith, that assent to them could not fairly be refused; and so to inculcate the rules of life, that (those articles being received) the practice of these could not reasonably be declined. Accordingly I shall, in as few words as I can, state the nature of these several subjects, and the methods used for treating them as the nature of each required.

The objects of our faith in this case are of two sorts: 1. they may be facts already done; such as the incarnation, birth, life, miracles,

sufferings, death, resurrection and ascent of the Lord Jesus; his mission of the Holy Ghost upon the apostles; and in virtue of that power the wonders wrought and the church established by them, and the like; or, 2. they may be doctrines grounded on those facts; and so the remission of sins is upon our Lord's meritorious death; the resurrection of our bodies, upon his rising again; the judgment to come, upon his exaltation to the throne of God; and the like. Or if there be no such particular dependence and relation as this, yet they may be such as are therefore said to be grounded on facts already done; by reason the very doing of those facts rendered the testimony of that teacher by whom they had been done worthy of belief.

Now those facts have a right to our assent which are related by persons who must be presumed to have had a perfect knowledge of the matters they report, and to lie under no temptation of misrepresenting what they know". The former qualification will preserve them from being deceived themselves; the latter will free them from any suspicion of designing to impose upon other people. This is all we ask for establishing the credit of any witness. And no history was ever yet transmitted to the world with an authority equal to that of the holy penmen upon both the forementioned accounts.

1. The facts reported were abundantly notorious. Those concerning our Lord's incarnation and nativity were proved by the known pregnancy of the Virgin before any cohabitation with her espoused husband; by the prediction of the angel to Zacharias and Mary: the former whereof had been made a general discourse by a sudden loss of speech, and the no less surprising restitution of it. The latter, by Mary's three months' abode with her cousin Elizabeth; the place, time, and manner of being delivered of her wonderful child; the occasion that brought them to Bethlehem; and the report of the shepherds concerning the vision of angels, and all the particulars they had seen, to the amazement of the whole country.

The rest, and much the greater part of these facts, (by which those other received abundant confirmation,) were the miracles, the discourses, and most memorable passages of our Lord's life and death; his return into the world again, and the circumstances of his leaving it. Now these were all objects of sense; such, consequently, as the meanest and most common men are capable and competent judges of. They had been done, not in the presence of one, or a few fanciful or partial spectators; but before great multitudes at once: many of them at those public festivals, which, by requiring the attendance of the Jews, brought a vast concourse of people to Jerusalem from the several quarters of their country: a country of but small extent, within which the scene of this whole transaction lay; a transaction that took up the space of but three or four years after Christ's baptism by John, and entrance upon his public ministry; and a ministry whose most remarkable occurrences appealed to the evidence even of enemies, who neither wanted the skill strictly to examine, nor the malice most wickedly to traduce and blaspheme, the mighty works too plain to be denied. So far would they have been from sparing to ex-

pose any fraud or misrepresentation, could such have been discovered either in the actions themselves, or in the accounts of them afterwards given to the world.

All this indeed we must conclude them highly concerned to do, in opposition to the consequences which they plainly saw would be drawn from the acknowledgment of their truth. For it is further to be noted, that most of Christ's actions recorded by the evangelists are of a very extraordinary nature. Such as foretelling future contingencies, healing the sick in an instant, restoring speech to the dumb, limbs to the cripples, sight to the blind, nay, even life to the dead, and many other marvellous works; but above all, that of raising himself the third day, after undeniable demonstration of his expiring upon the cross, the burial of his body, and all possible care to prevent any access to it.

Now if these facts could not, as we may fairly affirm they could not be, because they were not, disproved; it was easy to see, and the enemies of Christ and his religion were sufficiently aware, that such use would be made of them as would not comport either with their interests or inclinations, and yet such as it was not possible to avoid the mortification of. That these were acts out of the course and beyond the power of nature, was obvious: that the doer of them was assisted by any evil spirit, was incredible; for the design of our Lord's miracles was directly opposite to the devil's kingdom; neither does it appear that he can control the powers of nature at pleasure; and least of all is it to be imagined, that Almighty God, whose force is confessedly superior to his, would allow him in such a course of stupendous effects as must needs reflect upon infinite goodness and truth, by leaving it impossible for the most sincere of men to know when his assent is required to any doctrine as of Divine revelation, and (if these of Jesus were not so) what those mighty signs are, in which we ought to acquiesce as the finger and undoubted works of God.

For, after what hath been offered upon this subject heretofore*, I suppose there is no need of adding, that the true and proper credentials of a message from heaven are miracles: that this is an issue upon which Jews and Gentiles in all ages have been content to be tried: so that unless the miracles of our Lord and his apostles could be denied to have been wrought by a Divine power, there can be no just ground for denying our assent to any doctrines taught by them. And unless the facts themselves could be disproved, there is no possible way left to persuade any reasonable man that the wonderful things recorded of them were, or indeed could be, the effects of any power other than Divine.

Thus much may suffice for the nature and condition of those truths propounded to mankind as articles of the Christian faith. We will now observe, how justly the persons proposing them might be said, from their manner of proceeding, *to commend themselves to every man's conscience by manifestation of the truth*: that is, to have acted so clearly and fairly as would take away all excuse from those unbelievers who refused the truth so manifested by them.

* See Gospel for the second Sunday after Epiphany.

And first, this was done by the method taken in publishing the history of the gospel. It is certainly a very great advantage to any truth to have escaped all endeavours of suppression, notwithstanding the fairest opportunities put into the hands of its adversaries for examining and confuting it. As particularly if the time, place, manner and importance of the relation do all so concur to this purpose, that if we could conceive it to be false, we must at the same time conceive it utterly impossible that it should ever have been received for true.

(1.) But now the gospel history, and the doctrines founded thereupon, did quickly get footing, and do still, God be thanked, maintain their ground, with a very considerable part of mankind. And yet no lie was ever so ill contrived to pass upon the world as this would, had it been one. For they who labour to impose false characters and accounts are wise enough to wait a proper season. And such mortality is sure to give; when the present generation are laid to sleep, and credulous posterity prepared for impressions depending upon distant reports which none can contradict. But the evangelists did not stay till all memory of the matters recorded by them was worn out. These, as hath been hinted before, were all done within the remembrance of most men then alive; by far the greater part of them in a very little while before. They began to be published abroad immediately, in ten days after our Lord's ascension: the event most of all insisted on as an evidence and confirmation of all the rest (I mean our blessed Lord's resurrection from the dead) was openly preached in fifty days after it happened; and continued to be so from thenceforward without any interval of cessation: the whole account of our Lord's life and death was committed to writing by the evangelist and apostle of this day about eight years, as is most probably computed, after that death of his. This prudent care of preserving the truth from the variations, mistakes, and corruptions to which verbal reports are inevitably exposed, induced the apostles to take copies of this Gospel into the several regions where they travelled; and by these, left behind them, to supply the want of their own presence and preaching when the service of religion called them off to other countries. The same reasons moved St. Mark and St. Luke to write their accounts not long after. And St. John's, the latest of all by far, was yet early enough to have been disproved by great numbers then surviving, had any thing contained there been liable to just censure. Of these four, two, we know, testify what themselves saw and heard; and the two other had their accounts at the very first hand. St. Mark, as I took notice formerly^p, from Peter; and St. Luke, as himself declares^q, from a perfect understanding of all things from the very first, communicated to him by those who were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word from the beginning. But all of them agree in a fair challenge, as it were, to any who should presume to question their authority, by this early appeal, for the truth of what they reported, to the memories and consciences of many thousands, eye and ear-witnesses as well as themselves, and still in being, to attest or contradict, as they should

^p St. Mark's Life.

^q Luke i. 2, 3.

see just cause. All which was making an experiment which no man of common sense or modesty would have the hardiness to venture upon, if not conscious to himself that his reports will bear the test, and gain the more credit in proportion as they are more nicely inquired into.

(2.) The same argument holds good with regard to place. For if a man were disposed to form a modern hero out of his own brain, the scene would certainly be laid in some very distant country, quite out of all knowledge, and if possible out of all communication with that whose inhabitants he intends thus to amuse. This is a notion so natural as to render the liberties taken by great travellers (as the last particular of time does the discourses of men in extreme old age) suspected even to a proverb. But would any man in his wits hope to put off a forgery, not only near the time, but in the very place where the matters contained in it are said to have been done? And yet to Judea and Galilee, but chiefly to Jerusalem, it is that all our Lord's actions were confined. The whole country small enough to be without any great pains searched over; but neither of that had men any need, since those reported to be done at Jerusalem lay ready at hand, and those done in any other part might be easily known by examining the multitudes who from every part paid thrice each year their attendance at Jerusalem. And yet in this very Jerusalem it was that the apostles first published these things. Here they insisted on them, especially at those solemn festivals. Here they continued a long time, as ready upon all occasions to justify themselves, and answer all opposers. And here the substance of what they affirmed and taught was first committed to writing. But of all places, why here! To be sure, had they been impostors, this of all places was the most inconvenient. Instead of tarrying in the city, they should have fled out of it immediately, transported themselves to the remotest and most barbarous countries, and hastened to tell their tale there, before truth and their own infamy should overtake them. And this, no doubt, would have been their method, had they designed a fraud. But truth and the propagators of it desire the light. And the daring to stand their ground was a plain indication that Jerusalem was the common centre from whence their doctrine should extend itself over the whole world; because the centre in which our Lord's actions and sufferings and the evidences of them met. Where every fresh comer might either come a witness or go back a proselyte; and from whence the apostles distributed themselves, to make an easier conquest of the world; after the same of multiplying converts, and a long triumph here over the vain contradictions of them who wanted nothing but the power to destroy their reputation and their persons together.

(3.) The credibility of the gospel history appears yet farther by the great variety of facts there related, and the many remarkable circumstances with which each of them is set forth. When men write with an intention to deceive, they find it the safest course to be as little particular as well they can; to confine their discourse to a few instances, and to report things in general terms and a summary way.

But in this case a direct contrary method is taken. The number of our Lord's miracles is almost infinite; and yet that number was so far from being affected, or proceeding from a vain ostentation, that *many other*, indeed the yet many more *things which Jesus did* were industriously omitted. Indeed the end aimed at was to give us sufficient, but not to oppress us with superfluous, evidence of his Divine nature and power.

Again, in the miracles expressly recounted we have punctual notice taken of the times when, the places where, and frequently the dwellings and the qualities and the names of the persons upon whom they were severally done. All which contributed to render the inquiry more easy for any who had the curiosity to make it. And as it furnished a ready way to remove the doubts of them who were desirous of full satisfaction, so it gave great scope and opportunity to those who thought themselves concerned to weaken the credit of these historians. And this would have been effectually done, if any one out of so many facts, nay if any one circumstance belonging to any one of those facts, could have been clearly refuted. But this is what we never find yet done, either by detecting a falsehood in any of these writers separately, or by shewing any inconsistency between the report of each when compared with the rest. An advantage which, we may be confident, was not neglected, if we suffer ourselves at all to reflect upon another consideration yet behind, I mean,

(4.) The importance of the facts related here. Now this was no less than the establishing a new religion, in many points diametrically opposite to those wherein education and custom, natural inclinations, vicious habits, and worldly interests, had already engaged men. Religion hath ever been esteemed a matter of the last concernment by sober people of all persuasions whatsoever; not to be taken up or parted with rashly and upon slight surmises. Had therefore the Christian religion found men unprepossessed in favour of any other, it is not to be conceived that even thus it should have been embraced without long and serious examination. But where the prejudices to be vanquished were so many and so strong, the making its way through all these must needs have been a work of exceeding great difficulty. The generality of people would be very tenacious of their old way, glad of any objection to keep their unbelief in countenance, and sure to allow every fresh one its utmost force and efficacy. We may therefore depend upon it that no pains were spared in a nice and critical and even partial inquiry into those facts, which, if once admitted, drew so long a train of unwelcome consequences after them, as nothing could prevail for submitting to, less than the clearest evidence and irresistible power of truth. And however weak it may seem in other cases to argue from actual nonexistence to impossibilities, yet in this it seems no more than reasonable, from the event and demonstration that there *was not*, to infer that there *could not be*, any falsehood or collusion charged upon the evangelists or their writings as now contained in the New Testament.

I should add, as another proof of all imaginable fair dealing upon

this occasion, their great sincerity and impartiality, so plainly to be gathered from not concealing many passages relating both to their Master and themselves, which would naturally tend to lessen both in the common opinion of the world. Such are, the meanness of our Lord's parentage, the obscurity of his life for thirty years, the contempt and insults of his enemies, the infirmities and passions he condescended to, the disorder and trouble of his agony in the garden, the scandal of his death, and the like. Such again, are the infamous occupation of some and the poor ones of others in their fraternity before their conversion and call; their heaviness and rebukes, the treachery of one, the denial of another, the positive and pertinacious unbelief of a third, the cowardice of all. But this argument having fallen under consideration heretofore¹, I content myself with a bare mention of it at present.

If we now proceed to those rules of living by which Christians were to walk, here again we shall find undeniable marks of their integrity, particularly in the following instances:

1. They urged the absolute necessity of a virtuous life, as the natural product of a true faith; and that without which Christ is *called Master and Lord* to no manner of purpose.

2. They ground this necessity upon the commands of our Saviour, the encouragements and assistances of his grace, the awe due to the all-seeing God and searcher of hearts, the present reproaches of conscience, the certainty of a future judgment, and the eternity of rewards and punishments, each in their kind unconceivably great, according to the good or bad things done in this body. Motives too forcible to be in reason withstood; such as leave no room for indulging oneself in hypocrisy or secret sins; but must prevail, if any can, for *cleansing ourselves from all filthiness both of flesh and spirit, and perfecting holiness in the fear of God*². And this the apostle seems to have had in view when professing himself here to have renounced the *hidden things of dishonesty*.

3. They inculcated these rules *without respect of persons*: not accommodating their doctrines to the lusts or humours of men; not courting the favour of the great, nor soothing the vanity of the learned and witty, at the expense of truth and their own integrity. They gave all people plainly to understand that God in the day of trial will make no such distinctions as are but too much regarded in this world; and those whom this plain dealing would not go down with they dared in conscience of their duty to disoblige; as knowing that, whatever were the consequence, they *ought not to go beyond the word of the Lord, to say less or more*. A noble pattern for their successors, the ministers of the gospel, in all ages, which they who are not careful strictly to imitate betray the cause of God, prostitute their character, and have lost all right to this most valuable comfort of St. Paul before us, of *not walking in craftiness, nor handling the word of God deceitfully*.

4. They lived up to the principles taught by them, and confirmed their instructions by their examples. Of how great influence this is,

¹ Gospel for St. Thomas's day.

² 2 Cor. vii. 1.

common experience proves. And every one sees the justice of that indignation with which our Lord rebukes the hypocrisy of those Pharisees and scribes, *who bound heavy burdens and grievous to be borne, and laid them on men's shoulders; but they themselves would not move them with one of their fingers*¹. These teachers, quite contrary, declined no hardship, omitted no duty, to which they exhorted others; but, like true leaders in this spiritual warfare, distinguished themselves by the most eminent degrees of piety and virtue. They could appeal to every place they came to *how holy and just and unblameable* their behaviour there had been². Their bitterest enemies indeed, though they sought with all the nicety that envy and hatred could inspire, were not able to find any occasion of reproach in them. The only crime alleged against them was an undaunted zeal in propagating Christianity, and inflexible constancy in the profession of it. Which was in truth not a crime, but one of their brightest virtues, and gave another undeniable evidence of their faithfulness and honesty; that,

5. Lastly, of suffering and dying in testimony of the doctrines taught and written by them. This was the case of every evangelist, every apostle, (St. John only excepted,) so far as any notices of their lives and deaths have been delivered to posterity. And how justly he also may be reckoned among the martyrs hath been formerly observed³. Of what they endured, and how little threatenings and persecutions weighed with them, the book of Acts gives a large specimen. But after enduring bodily torments, and all that makes this life uncomfortable, to lay down even life itself; *to refuse deliverance*; and neither be softened with allurements nor broken with terrors; is not this a proof of believing themselves, and being in very good earnest? Can lies and forgeries, humour and obstinacy, artifice and popularity, affectation of novelty living, or of a name when dead, produce one such martyr since the creation? But if some one were so insatuated, could *twelve* men be supposed to persist in such wickedness and folly? Could those twelve not only sacrifice themselves, but persuade others that it is their duty to do the like when called to it; and in this argument succeed so well, that hundreds and thousands should actually do the like; and for three centuries together continue to offer up themselves with joy and triumph; and in so great a number and so long time, not one, when put to the question, discover the fraud, and at once save himself and do his duty? These are extravagancies never to be supposed: and those are effects that never were or could be produced by any cause less powerful than a full assurance of innocency and truth. Both which are so evident and illustrious in the first preachers and writers of the Christian religion, that a candid and considerate man may almost stand amazed how there should remain such a thing as an infidel in the world. He must do so, had not St. Paul here told us whence this comes to pass, when saying at the third and fourth verses, *If our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost: in whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them.*

¹ Matt. xxiii. 3, 4.

² 1 Thess. ii. 10.

³ Gospel for St. John's day.

These words suggest a second general topic of discourse comprised in the passage now before us, and seem to import thus much: that when the Christian doctrines have not their intended success, such inefficacy cannot always be with justice imputed either to the want of sufficient force in the arguments brought for it, or to the defects or mismanagements of the arguer; but is frequently, generally indeed, owing to the faults or indispositions, the wilful or the judicial blindness and hardness of their hearts to whom such arguments are proposed in vain.

Two points this subject would now engage me in, but that they have been considered in some former parts of this work. The first concerns the fatal power of prejudice, especially that which proceeds from the consideration of worldly advantages. The other respects the nature of that blindness and hardness of heart which is inflicted as a punishment, and the justice of God in punishments of this kind. The former hath been observed, vol. i. p. 28, 69, 450, vol. ii. p. 407; the latter, vol. i. p. 150, 191—194, 453, 454, 540, 541.

I conclude with calling upon my reader seriously to weigh these signatures of truth here briefly touched upon, and the many more that might have been laid before him; particularly that of these very historians attesting their own veracity and mission by the like credentials from heaven as their great Master had done his, and the astonishing successes with which their labours were so early crowned. The more such considerations are attended to, the more surprised we must needs be at the boldness and impiety of a set of men among us, who at this time of day undertake to free their brethren, as they sometimes speak, from the bondage of religion by insulting and attacking the authority of the holy Scriptures; a wickedness as impotent and absurd as it is malicious and perverse. For how vain an imagination is it to think of prejudicing men against these writings with an idle pretence of forgeries and frauds, of which they, who had equal good-will to Christianity, but much greater opportunities of tracing and detecting, could never find the least footstep! Can any thing new be expected at this distance in a cause which it was everybody's concern and endeavour to try with the most curious and severe inquisition? and which, after such trial, hath kept possession for sixteen hundred years? If not, can a greater affront be put upon mankind than to hope they will be bantered out of their religion by the nauseous cavils of infidels and heretics? There was a time indeed when those, how weak or wicked soever, were at least not out of season. But now to serve them up afresh, for new discoveries, after having been canvassed and refuted over and over many centuries ago, is to put too much upon the world, and equally proves the modesty, probity, and sagacity of these undertaking men.

In short, if the writings of the New Testament be false, it will not be possible to know that any are or ever were true. If the matters of fact related there are all fiction, not only the sacred but profane story, persons unconcerned in the cause, strangers, nay enemies, have helped forward the imposture by their concurrent testimonies: So that either the Scripture must be kept in veneration, or the credit

of all contemporary history must sink with it. But above all, let it not be objected that several miraculous actions and events recorded by the evangelists exceed our belief, since this will turn again upon them that make it. For that the Christian religion should prevail, and obtain so long in the world; a religion so contrary to sensual lusts and worldly interests; consisting of many truths to carnal understandings, such as St. Paul calls *the natural man*, offensive, and even folly; that such a religion, I say, should bear down all that were before it, make such wonderful progress, and maintain its conquests, in despite of all the opposition made against it, and all this without any miracles to introduce and support it, is an event more unaccountable, more incredible, than any, than all the miracles recorded by the four evangelists, and the history of three hundred years, taken together.

In a word, infidelity and irreligion are a *blindness* brought upon the heart by the god of this world; and the true way to believe and obey the gospel is to aspire after the disposition of that writer of it commemorated this day. For till we have forsaken covetous desires, and inordinate love of riches, it will not be possible for us with him sincerely to follow the Lord Jesus Christ. To whom, &c.

THE GOSPEL. St. Matt. ix. 9.

9 And as Jesus passed forth from thence, he saw a man, named Matthew, sitting at the receipt of custom: and he saith unto him, * Follow me. And he arose, and followed him.

10 And it came to pass, as Jesus sat at meat in the house, behold, many publicans and sinners came and sat down with him and his disciples.

with himself, (invited probably with a purpose to give them opportunity of receiving the benefit of conversion, as he had done.)

11 And when the Pharisees saw it, they said unto his disciples, Why eateth your Master with publicans and sinners?

12 But when Jesus heard that, he said unto them, They that be whole need not a physician, but they that are sick.

13 But go ye and learn what that meaneth, I will have mercy, and not sacrifice: for I am not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.

9. Compare St. Mark ii. 14—17, and St. Luke v. 27—32. *Quit that gainful employment, and attend on me for the future: and he did so immediately.

10. Hereupon he made a great feast for Jesus, at which were many of the same corrupt occupation

11. &c. See the Comment.

COMMENT.

We have this day set before us another eminent instance of the absolute freedom, the unspeakable mercy, and the wonderful efficacy, of that Divine grace, which, as once before of a persecutor^a, so now of

^a See St. Paul's day.

a publican, we are to consider making an apostle. This was indeed first in order of time, though the course of the year presented the other first to our view. But the prevalence of erroneous zeal and worldly affections is so fatally great, that no meditation proper upon the change of a Saul in his way to Damascus can misbecome that of a Matthew at the receipt of custom.

The nature of his employment, and the vices for which they who exercised it were deservedly notorious, my reader hath been told already^b. Which, however the other evangelists (as in charity and good nature became them) endeavour to cover this their brother from the infamy of^c, yet he, in great humility, both reports his own conversion, and constantly mentions himself in such manner as will not suffer us to doubt whether he, who is now so great in the kingdom of heaven, were not once that vile and wicked thing, *a publican*.

The danger and misery of his condition while such, the speedy and happy escape out of it, the goodness of our Lord in calling and the readiness of this apostle in complying, the constancy of his faith and sufferings, the indefatigable zeal of his labours, and the lasting benefit of his writings, are subjects which we may make the right improvement of by turning our eyes and thoughts back upon the instructions already laid down in the case of St. Andrew and St. Paul. At present therefore I choose to insist upon fresh matter, with which the Gospel for the day hath furnished us, from the tenth verse to the end.

This passage, compared with the parallel places of St. Mark and St. Luke, (as referred to before in the margin,) acquaints us, that the person said at the ninth verse to have been called by and to have followed Jesus, did, after this conversion, *make him a great feast at his own house*^d. Our Lord was pleased, not only to accept the invitation, but when there, not to disdain the company of many guests, as liable to censure and reproach as the master of the entertainment had lately been himself.

Of that freedom the Pharisees endeavour to take a malicious advantage^e. They insinuate here, that it was a matter of just offence, and very much unbecoming the character of one who professed himself a preacher of righteousness, to admit lewd and lost wretches into so great familiarity as sitting and eating at the same table. These were such as the Pharisees themselves thought it a profanation and mighty disparagement to be seen among. And therefore, when they observed Jesus less scrupulous in the point, they endeavour to lessen him in the esteem of his disciples by that question at the eleventh verse, *Why eateth your Master with publicans and sinners?*

From this malicious reflection our Lord vindicates himself in the two following verses. By arguments not necessary to be taken notice of now, because they will have their due place of being explained by and by. For my design in making choice of this passage is, to draw out of it some rules which may be useful in common conversation. This question of the Pharisees plainly implies, not only in themselves, but in the disciples to whom it was put, an opinion, that (ordinarily

^b Gospel for the eleventh Sunday after Trinity.

14. Eli. 18. and Luke v. 27, 29. vi. 15.

^c Comp. Matt. ix. 9. x. 3. with Mark ii.

^d Luke v. 29.

^e Ver. 11.

speaking) a good man will not, ought not to keep company with vile and notoriously evil men. On the other side, our Saviour's defence of his own practice proves that such opinion, however reasonable in the main, is not so necessarily and universally true, but that this may sometimes be done, and that by him particularly it was then highly fit to be done. Now the thing I aim at in the present discourse is, to shew in what cases, and with what limitations, it may be lawful to frequent the company of scandalously wicked persons. The consequences whereof will be, that the general rule of avoiding such company holds good where those circumstances do not make an exception to it. For the more regular proceeding in which point, I shall observe the following method:

First, I will consider several passages in Scripture which dissuade us from such company, and the reasons which not those texts only, but these Pharisees went upon in condemning them that frequent it.

Secondly, I shall shew the force of our Lord's arguments in his own defence, and that none of those reasons rendered his behaviour blamable in this matter. And then,

Thirdly, I shall lay down some cautions necessary for those who pretend to govern themselves by our Lord's example here, lest, for want of discretion in applying it to their own case, they make this action of his an occasion of danger and sin to themselves.

I. The first thing I propose is, the consideration of some passages in Scripture which dissuade us from the company of wicked and scandalous people; and of the reasons which both these texts and the Pharisees went upon in condemning them that frequent it.

Now some of the principal passages of Scripture relating to our present purpose are these that follow: *Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful^f. I have not dwelt with vain persons, neither will I have fellowship with the deceitful. I have hated the congregation of evildoers; and will not sit with the ungodly^g. When thou sawest a thief thou consentedst unto him, and hast been partaker with the adulterers^h. A froward heart shall depart from me: I will not know a wicked personⁱ. He that walketh with wise men shall be wise: but a companion of fools shall be destroyed^k. To which we may add that of the Son of Sirach: *He that toucheth pitch shall be defiled therewith; and he that hath fellowship with a proud man shall be like unto him^l*.*

In the New Testament St. Paul tells the Corinthians, *Now I have written unto you not to keep company, if any man that is called a brother be a fornicator, or covetous, or an idolater, or a railer, or a drunkard, or an extortioner; with such an one no not to eat^m*. And in his Second Epistleⁿ, *Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness? and what concord hath Christ with Belial? or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel? and what agreement hath the temple of God with idols? for ye are the temple of the living God; as God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God,*

^f Psalm l. 1. ^g Psalm xxvi. 4, 5. ^h Psalm l. 18. ⁱ Psalm. ci. 4. ^k Prov. xiii. 20.
^l Eccles. xiii. 1. ^m 1 Cor. v. 11. ⁿ 2 Cor. vi. 14, &c.

and they shall be my people. Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you. And once more: We command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye withdraw yourselves from every brother that walketh disorderly, and not after the tradition which he received of us. Agreeable whereunto is that exhortation to the Romans: I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them.

There is no need of explaining the particular occasions and immediate intention of these and other such like texts. It is sufficient that we understand in general the main ends they drive at, and the grounds they go upon. And I think it is very plain and easy to discern that all of them proceed upon some one or more of these three reasons:

1. First, we are commanded to avoid men of ill principles and practices, for fear our own should be corrupted by conversing with them. For it is not only by what we do ourselves, but by what we see others do, that vicious habits gather ground upon us. And there are moral as well as natural diseases of a contagious quality to those that come near, except they be armed beforehand with very strong antidotes against the power of this spreading pestilence. Hence Solomon makes use of those lively resemblances to express our danger in this case: *Can a man take fire in his bosom, and his clothes not be burned? Can one go upon hot coals, and his feet not be burned?*

When God brought his people into Canaan, he commanded them to destroy all the idolatrous inhabitants of the land. Not only as a punishment of the past abominations those wretched men had provoked him with, but for the security of these new comers, lest they should be mingled with them, and so learn their works. And indeed the venturing a man's self in debauched conversation needs no other proof of the infinite hazard attending it, than the numberless examples of souls hardened in all manner of wickedness by ill examples and profligate company. The justest abhorrences cool and wear off by being drawn in first to like men's persons and their wit; then growing partial to their vices too; till at last no excesses or profane liberties are so dreadful but we are content to see and allow, to comply with, nay even to vindicate and delight in them. Thus do the very things which were formerly wont to raise the greatest indignation, and even astonishment, engage first our affections, and then our imitation; and we are formed into those prodigies of wickedness we used to stand amazed at. Thus do these pests of human society scatter the plague wheresoever they come; and not only ruin themselves eternally, but make their acquaintance too too often, by the force of custom, or persuasion, or example, as much or more the children of hell than themselves.

But secondly, another reason for our declining the company of notoriously wicked men is, that hereby we may, as much as in us lies, discourage vice. This seems more directly to be the design of those passages quoted out of the New Testament. For though our own safety ought in the first place to be provided for, and all such tempta-

o 2 Thess. iii. 6.

p Rom. xvi. 17.

q Prov. vi. 27, 28.

tions carefully avoided as may bring our souls into danger, yet is not the safety of these our only care. There is also a constant and very tender regard due to the reputation of virtue and religion in general. And this would suffer but too much and too justly in the esteem of the world, if no distinctions should be made of men according to their behaviour. For how can we blame the many, who are chiefly guided by example, if they look upon virtue and vice as things indifferent, or of very little consequence, when they see the same respects paid to the worst and the best men? And what greater encouragement can the vilest wretches have to persist in their sinful courses, than to be courted and caressed, and receive all those marks of honour and esteem, which are only due (and were originally intended for incentives and rewards) to men whose worth and goodness hath distinguished and raised them above the rest of the world?

Hence, not among the Jews only, but in the better ages of Christianity too, it was always accounted a blemish to associate with such wretches as lived in open breach and contempt of their duty. And the casting out such from the church by public censures was ever looked upon as a punishment which did not only shut them out from any right and part in the offices of religion, but declared them unworthy the benefits of civil society; and prohibited all the sound members of this body from such communication with them in any kind, as might administer the least countenance and comfort, while they continued inflexible and unreformed. Nay, even where their corruptions were not so flagrant, or the discipline not so speedy and severe to bring them under this public cognisance, yet zealous and good men held themselves obliged, by withdrawing from their company, to shame them into better manners. And very certain it is, that nothing is more likely to work upon such men's tempers and draw them off from their folly, than the making them sensible, by all prudent ways of expressing our indignation, that vice deserves to be despised, and creates an irreconcilable aversion and disesteem in all whose friendship and regards are truly valuable, that is, in every wise and good man.

Among other appeals to God for the sincerity of his heart in his service, David makes use of this, *Do not I hate them, O Lord, that hate thee? and am not I grieved with those that rise up against thee? Yea, I hate them right sore: I count them mine enemies*^r. And indeed, if the consorting with rebels and traitors be, in the eye of the law, construed an abetting their villainous designs, how shall we approve our loyalty and affection to the King of kings, while we support and countenance those wretched creatures who trample his laws underfoot, and do the utmost that their impotent malice can do to undermine his government, and draw others into rebellion against him? So indispensably necessary is it to put a difference between good and ill men in the choice of our friendships and our conversation; for the more effectually discountenancing of wickedness, for the greater encouragement of virtue, for preserving the honour due to God and religion, and for the testifying our own sincerity and love of these to the world.

Thirdly, another reason which those passages of Scripture may be

very well supposed to have in view is, the regard men ought to have for their own reputation. This, when it looks no further than a vain ambition of being spoken and thought well of, is then indeed of little significance; but highly to be commended in other respects, as it gives credit and authority to our words and actions, and enables us to do abundance of good in the world. Those men therefore, who suffer themselves to become indifferent to the opinion and judgment of others concerning them, seem not to understand the value and consequence of these things. Which are in truth so great, that where people are biassed in our favour, we may even work wonders upon them; and, on the other hand, where they are violently prejudiced against us, even wonders themselves will work nothing upon them. Now these judgments are frequently formed, not only from the actions we do ourselves, but from the morals of them who are particularly intimate and dear to us. When men see us choose and delight in the conversation of dissolute and scandalous livers, they will be apt to conclude us birds of the same feather; and that whatever face we may put upon the matter, yet in our hearts we think very favourably of such men and their practices. For were there not some likeness in the dispositions, there could be no relief for a sort of conversation which we profess to be so very distant and unsuitable to our tempers. Thus we find that when the Pharisees could fasten nothing of immorality upon our Lord from any other actions of his life, they thought it sufficient to tax his conduct in this particular; and from that easiness of access which he allowed the most infamous people, represented him to the world as a *gluttonous man, and a winebibber, a friend of publicans and sinners*.*

Now it cannot be denied but, according to the measures usually observed in our familiarities, the principle of judging men by their associates is not very unreasonable. Nay, it may be one of the surest rules where we know nothing sufficient to form a judgment of by the persons themselves. But though this minister some ground of suspicion that those men are bad whose acquaintances are known to be so, yet we cannot draw any infallible conclusions from it: nor is either this or either of the former reasons of that necessary obligation, that every person should deserve to be condemned who engages in conversation with wicked men. For, to set this matter in its true light, I shall now prove the Pharisees mistaken in the case of our blessed Saviour. He ate and drank with publicans and sinners, and his enemies thought wickedly that *he was such a one as they*; but *he reproveth them, and set before them truly the thing that he had done*. This is what I propose therefore to consider in the second place:

II. The behaviour of our blessed Lord, and the force of the arguments produced in the defence of it. From whence it will appear that none of the reasons alleged under the former head came so up to his case as to render him blameworthy in this point.

The first of these arguments is contained in those words—*They that be whole need not a physician, but they that are sick*†. By which he intimates that he was about the discharge of his proper business.

* Luke vii. 34.

† Matt. ix. 12.

And as a physician's profession calls him among such virulent distempers, where it would be the extremity of foolhardiness for others to come; so he, whose office it was to heal souls, ought not to refuse his assistance to those whose circumstances most of all wanted his help and advice. The more raging the disease was, the better it became his character to administer to it.

Thus the first of those reasons formerly urged against conversing with notorious sinners did not reach our Saviour's case. For he came not in the way of this infection so as to endanger himself; but purely to relieve them that lay languishing under it, and to recover that sickness which must have proved fatal, had not he, in marvellous charity, condescended to interpose his care.

The second argument used in his own defence is contained in that saying of the prophet Hosea, applied to this present purpose, *I will have mercy, and not sacrifice*^u. By the former of these, *mercy*, are meant all those instances of kindness to our neighbour whereby we may promote his advantage. By the latter, *sacrifice*, the rites and ordinances of the ceremonial law; among which sacrifice was the chief. And by God's declaring that he *will have* the one and *not* the other, is not signified his refusal or absolute disallowance of either; but only that he prefers *mercy* before *sacrifice*, and is desirous that those duties which are enjoined only as marks of our obedience to him, without any other consideration to recommend them, should give place to such as are of substantial benefit and intrinsic goodness. Now the Jews, and more especially that strictest sect of them, the Pharisees, held it unlawful to keep company with or come near to men of other nations. And this was one pretence of shunning publicans, because they were either foreigners themselves, or engaged by their calling to have dealings with such; by which they were looked upon as legally unclean. But this notion they carried yet farther; and made that ordinance, which was designed to preserve their innocence, a pretence for hypocrisy and moroseness and disdain. They laid the chief stress upon the outward formality; accosted all who were not equal to themselves in superstition with a—*Stand off, I am holier than thou*; and held such as were really, or such as they accounted, wicked and profane, in so great contempt, that they took no care to make them better, but thought it even a fault and a defilement to converse with them, though for that very purpose.

But now our blessed Saviour's conduct was very different from theirs. And this conduct he vindicates, by putting them in mind that, however the eternal rites and peculiar distinctions of the law might be acceptable to God in their due place and season, yet charity to men's souls, which is the highest act of *mercy*, was much more esteemed by him. And that passage of the prophet Hosea might satisfy them that God thought himself better served, and the honour of religion more effectually consulted, when men apply themselves to the turning sinners from their evil way by seasonable instruction and reproof, and laying before them the evil of their doings, than when such are suffered to perish in their folly, out of a most inhuman as well as unrea-

^u Hosea vi. 6, &c.

reasonable nicety, that it is not lawful to converse with such men at all. When things are come to extremity, and such precious treasures as souls lie at stake, it is no time to stand upon form and ceremony. And therefore our Lord set those punctilios aside in the present case.

Thus it appears again, that neither did his conversing with notoriously evil men come within the second reason for avoiding such under the former head. Which was, for fear vice should by this means be too much encouraged, and virtue discountenanced. For the end and effect of Jesus admitting these publicans and sinners into his company was the bringing them over from their vices, and promoting the honour and increase of religion.

Thirdly, another argument, if it be not rather an illustration of those which went before, is comprehended in these words: *I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance*^{*}. Thus he explains to them the great design of his appearance in the world to be the changing and reforming men's manners and dispositions. A change, of which the righteous, standing in less need, should no more grudge the opportunities of it to sinners, than the healthful ought to think themselves neglected and disparaged when a physician forbears the visits to them which he makes to the sick. And a change, of so mighty benefit where it can be effected, that no distinctions and points of mere ceremony are worthy to come in competition with it. So that if God prefer *mercy* before *sacrifice* in general, no doubt can be made but he would be exceedingly well pleased that this highest and most beneficial act of *mercy*, the teaching and converting the ignorant and wanderers, should take place of that meanest branch of *sacrifice*, the declining having any thing at all to do with such men, in abhorrence of their vices, and out of a conceit that their conversation stains and pollutes all that come near them.

Thus again our Lord acquits himself from the third reason under the former head; that of endangering his reputation by such company, and giving grounds of jealousy that he was secretly such himself. For all he did was in pursuance of his office; he could not have answered his character, nor the end of his coming into the world, should he have behaved himself otherwise. And it were as reasonable to suppose that a physician puts himself into sick chambers to catch those diseases he comes to cure, as to object against our Lord's suffering the publicans and sinners to approach him, that he was a friend and favourer of that wickedness which he came to destroy and to dispossess. But how could this be done, except by shewing them the error of their ways, and enabling them to grow better for the time to come? So that, upon the whole matter, here was no offence given; and that which was taken did not proceed from any mismanagement in our Lord's behaviour, but from the malice and blind superstition of the Pharisees themselves.

Thus I have gone through the two first heads I propounded. The former shewed the reasons of avoiding ill company which the texts of scripture concerning this matter proceed upon, and such as might minister some ground for that question, *Why eateth your Master with*

publicans and sinners? The second contained those arguments by which our blessed Master proves himself unblamable in so doing. I proceed now to my

III. Third and last head, wherein I promised to lay down some cautions for governing ourselves after Christ's example here; lest, by an indiscreet application of this action to our own case, we should render that which in him was commendable and good an occasion of danger and sin to us.

Now for the understanding this matter aright it will be necessary to mention three things, which, when considered and justly compared with our own circumstances, will prove so many excellent rules to take our measures by in the case now before us. And these are, first, the condition of the person who allowed these publicans and sinners to eat with him. Secondly, the quality or disposition of those publicans and sinners themselves. And thirdly, the end and design aimed at in this behaviour.

First, it is fit we observe the condition of the person who did thus eat with publicans and sinners. It was our Master, Jesus Christ. He, by the personal union of his own Divine with our human nature, and by the miraculous method of taking this nature upon him, was not only free from that original depravation which strongly disposes us to evil, but under an absolute impossibility of contracting any actual guilt. Safe then he was, above all reach of danger, in his personal capacity; and if to that we add his public character, what he might safely do in the former respect it oven behoved him to do in this latter. For how shall the physician heal those sick with whose maladies he never acquaints himself? Or how shall a reformer of manners call those sinners to repentance with whom he never converses? So then these circumstances of our blessed Lord instruct us that some may and that others should be sometimes conversant with notoriously wicked men. And they instruct us likewise what sort of persons those are who are either fit, and so may venture, or who are even obliged, and so must not refuse, to take all seasonable opportunities of conversing with such people.

They then are proper for this hazardous undertaking who resemble their Master in innocence and godly zeal. Resemble him as frail men are capable; by keeping themselves unspotted from the world, by fixed principles of virtue, and tried resolutions, and long confirmed habits of doing well. Such as have got the upper hand of temptations, and keep a strong and constant guard over their infirmities, and are thoroughly convinced of the necessity, the reasonableness, the excellency of a holy life. Or such who, if they have not been so happy as always to have preserved their virtue unblemished, have yet profited by their own former dangers, and are possessed with so just an horror of the sins wherewith they were once entangled, that there is oven less likelihood of their falling into the snare again than if they had never been overtaken at all.

But for others, who are raw and undisciplined, for young people, whose passions and temptations are violent, or for them whose principles are not sufficiently settled by knowledge and mature considera-

tion and experience, and an entire love of God and goodness, the best thing they can do is to keep at a distance from evil. To mingle with vicious company and examples is too dangerous an experiment for them to make. The best intentions will not be security sufficient for persons not qualified to persevere in them. Good principles too often degenerate: and though it be great charity to endeavour the reforming of others, yet it is great imprudence to attempt what we are not a match for. Every man therefore should first measure his own strength, and not hazard the being beaten off from his own steadfastness. For I doubt it is no new thing for unwary men, who labour to prevent a friend's falling down a precipice, and venture too near the brink to save him, to be pulled in with him, and so both perish together in their folly.

Again, our Lord, considered in his public capacity, proves that some are even bound upon some occasions not to decline the company of vicious men. That is, such as resemble him in that capacity. And such particularly are the ministers of the gospel. For they too are physicians of souls, they too are sent to call sinners to repentance. Therefore, for these absolutely to refuse such conversation is to withdraw from their duty, and neglect the best opportunities of performing the great trust given them in charge. It is not by preaching and public instruction only that sinners are won over to the principles of truth and soberness; but by private admonitions, by gentle and seasonable reproofs; by applying our doctrines to the respective cases of men more pertinently and closely than a discourse from the pulpit can in the nature of the thing admit. It is by insinuating ourselves into their good opinion, gaining upon their affections by degrees, watching their softer hours, and the most favourable seasons of doing them good: and so saying many things alone, which would not be received, or not have the same successful impressions, at another time and place. And every one who at all reflects upon the constitution of mankind in general, must needs discern the usefulness of these holy arts. For men naturally love to be treated with respect; but sourness of spirit, and an upbraiding haughtiness of behaviour, as naturally begets dislike. And many will be prevailed upon by the charms of courtesy and condescension and Christian compassion prudently applied, who would perfectly fly off, and be but more provoked and desperately hardened, by a pharisaical disdain or supercilious contempt. The wickedness and danger of our brethren's souls calls for tenderness and pity and a helping hand. But even when indignation and severity become necessary, constant care must be taken that this do not savour of spiritual pride. We ought to hate men's vices with an irreconcilable hatred; but this must be so tempered that it do not obstruct their reformation, by betraying us to insolent and scornful behaviour toward those who commit such wickedness. And therefore, the same apostle who forbids having such familiarities with evil men as might encourage them in their sins does not forget to command withal, that we *should not count such men as enemies, but admonish them as brethren*.

Secondly, the consideration of the persons whom our Lord admitted to such freedoms with him suggests to us another very useful rule for

governing our behaviour in the present case. They were *publicans and sinners* indeed, men of very ill conversation and infamous character: but then they were such as thrust themselves upon Christ, coveted to hear him, were eager to be instructed, and at this time, most probably moved with the call of their old companion St. Matthew, were desirous to partake of like grace and reformation themselves. Now this plainly intimates to us, that there is a mighty difference between seeking the company of wicked men, and suffering it only; between disdaining, and taking delight in them. And again, that there is a distinction to be made between those who, though bad, yet are willing to be better; and others, who are perverse and unpersuadable, and even glory in their shame. None but ill men can make ill men their choice. To prefer and take pleasure in such above others, is a demonstration that our inclinations are naught. For only distempered palates can find an agreeable relish in corrupt and filthy, obscene or profane communication. But to endure such persons for their own profit, and in order to bring them off from their follies, is a mortification to ourselves, which in tenderness to souls under manifest hazard of eternal ruin becomes us very well.

So again, when such wretches are fierce and intractable, heady and highminded, professed contemnors and revilers of God and every thing that is sacred; though here the rule of coming out from them who will not suffer any good to be done upon them hold; yet where sinners are sadly sensible of their danger or their ignorance, and would gladly improve by our company, God forbid that the blackest and most scandalous offences should make us despise and neglect them! We should look upon such advances as very happy occasions; and account it a great matter and a very promising beginning that they are content to hear reason, and have any desires of knowing and doing better. And these desires we ought by all means to cherish and to gratify; by enlightening their dark minds, contending patiently with their prejudices, condescending, as much as fairly we may, to their infirmities; and thinking ourselves exceeding well employed if we can, though but by slow degrees, weaken the power of vicious customs, restrain them from some acts at least of licentiousness, and plant the seeds of virtue in their stead. When we have found that this cannot be done, it is then time to shake them off, and shew them that we will not be partakers with them in their sins. But so long as they give us any hopes of reclaiming them, then, though we should run some risk of having our conduct misinterpreted, as our great Master's here was, yet even so, nothing should seem too much, no condescension too great, to compass so blessed a design as the saving those souls from death and the power of Satan, who used to be *taken captive by him at his will*. For,

Thirdly, we must observe the end our Saviour aimed at by this behaviour. He conversed with sinners for the very same purpose that others avoided them for. Which was, to bring them off from the evil of their doings, and to promote repentance and holiness of life. And the keeping this end constantly in view will direct us in what manner and with what limitations wicked men are to be kept

company with: that is, so as may not hurt ourselves, and yet may be profitable for them. Never to mingle with such men is neither possible nor convenient. Nature, and relation, and interest, and many both private and public engagements, may bring us under a necessity of dealing and conversing with and paying civil respects to very profligate persons. For a man's being wicked will not excuse our forgetting that he is a father, or a brother, or a superior, or useful to our own or the common good. But where such a one hath the most that can be supposed to recommend him to us, surely we may and should so order the matter, that he may understand how much yet dearer and more acceptable he would be, if his virtues to conspired to raise our affection and esteem for him. In fine, we should court the acquaintance of the good only for our own sakes: if we seek that of ill men, it should be purely for their sakes. And if such be refractory, and will reap no benefit by us, the most we can do is to bear them. Nor may we so far bear them neither, as to seem in any degree satisfied with their faults. We should rebuke them where it can be properly done; and where it cannot, we should shew all those marks of sorrow and displeasure which can become our character and theirs. But this caution must constantly be observed: for sauciness and ill manners are not like to make converts; and such a zeal will find as little success as it brings knowledge.

The considerations I have spoken to, if duly weighed and practised, will so moderate and direct our proceedings, that we shall keep the middle way between the haughtiness of the Pharisee and the negligence of the dissolute and profane. We shall eat with sinners without defiling ourselves by their acquaintance. We shall not only save our own souls, but theirs too. We shall cherish the penitent, and not encourage the abandoned and obstinate. We shall so satisfy the obligations of society, as at the same time to preserve those of religion entire. And instead of falling in, and being borne down with the torrent of ungodliness, we shall *walk warily in these dangerous days*, move others to earnest and speedy repentance, and become *burning and shining lights in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation*.

ST. MICHAEL AND ALL ANGELS.

THE COLLECT.

O EVERLASTING God, who hast ordained and constituted the services of angels and men in a wonderful order^a; Mercifully grant, that as thy holy angels alway do thee service in heaven, so by thy appointment they may succour and defend us on earth; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

^a Psalm xxxiv. 7. xci. 11, 12; Matt. xviii. 10; Heb. i. 14.

THE EPISTLE. Rev. xii. 7.

7 *And there was war in heaven : Michael and his angels fought against the dragon ; and the dragon fought and his angels,*

8 *And prevailed not ; neither was their place found any more in heaven.*

9 *And the great dragon was cast out, that old serpent, called the Devil, and Satan, which deceiveth the whole world : he was cast out into the earth, and his angels were cast out with him.*

10 *And I heard a loud voice saying in heaven, Now is come salvation, and strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the power of his Christ : for the accuser of our brethren is cast down, which accused them before our God day and night.*

11 *And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of their testimony ; and they loved not their lives unto the death.*

12 *Therefore rejoice, ye heavens, and ye that dwell in them. Woe to the inhabitants of the earth and of the sea ! for the devil is come down unto you, having great wrath, because he knoweth that he hath but a short time.*

COMMENT.

In speaking to this scripturo, I shall lay before my reader the several interpretations of learned men upon it ; and then make such use of these as may be most proper and practical.

But before we proceed to either of these, it is fit to observe one point wherein they seem all to agree. Which is, that Michael, and the squadrons under his command, are those good angels whose ministry God hath been all along pleased to employ for the benefit and defence of his people. That archangel, according to the ancient traditions of the Jews, is generally described as the patron and conductor of Israel under the law. And he is here understood as one constantly intent upon performing the like kind offices to the spiritual Israel under the gospel.

On the other hand : Satan, or the devil, hath been as constantly represented for the prince of those evil angels who, *having fallen from their first estate* of holiness and bliss, act in direct opposition to that other prince and his good angels. Their constant business is to contrive all the mischief and calamities that possibly they can to the church and people of God. In order to effect which, they neglect no means or opportunities of which their condition renders them capable to corrupt the principles and practices of mankind ; thereby to deprive them of the Divine favour and protection, and make them the just objects of his displeasure and wrath, in whose fatherly care and affection all their safety and happiness consists.

In pursuance of these notions, common to all interpreters, some have looked upon this passage to be wholly allegorical^b. By *heaven*^c understanding good Christians. So called, because their affections and conversation already are, as they hope their souls and bodies will one day be and reign for ever, in heaven. By *war in heaven*, they mean the

^b Zeger.^c Ver. 7.

temptations to sin during the warfare of these good men here below, which the powers of darkness perpetually suggest and promote; while those of light labour with equal industry to prevent and defeat them. By *the devil being cast out, and having no more place in heaven*^a, they suppose to be meant the overthrow of vice and error, the happy and wonderful improvement of knowledge and virtue; but particularly the utter extirpation of idolatry, and of all those diabolical superstitions and bestialities which made so great a part of the heathen worship, by the propagation and progress of the Christian faith. All which St. John describes as a victory obtained *by the blood of the Lamb, by the word of testimony, and not loving their lives unto the death*^c: because faith in Jesus Christ, as the Saviour and sacrifice for the sins of the world, the pure doctrine of the gospel, and the constancy of those sufferings and persecutions endured for the sake of the truth, were the instruments whereby this glorious change was wrought^f. A natural consequence whereof are those praises and exultations of the heavenly powers, who rejoice in the happiness of us their fellow-creatures; and a charitable commiseration of the unconverted world. The gross and carnal, the tumultuous and fluctuating state of whose minds are, by an elegant metaphor, styled *the earth and the sea*, upon whom the evil spirits do still exercise a less controlled dominion.

Others apply this passage to the celebrated defeat of Simon Magus at Rome: that *dragon*, as St. Cyril calls him; the ringleader and first head of heresy; who gave out that he was the same God that appeared at giving the law in mount Sinai, and had now again exhibited himself in the person of Jesus Christ. As such he required the adoration of his followers, prevailed at Rome so far as in the reign of Claudius to have a statue erected to his honour: but in that of Nero he was openly confronted by St. Peter and St. Paul: and having, as a proof of his divine power, promised to fly in the air upon a fiery chariot; these two apostles by their prayers so confounded his sorceries, that he fell in the presence of the people, broke his legs, retired to Brunda, and there, not able any longer to support the pain and shame this vain experiment had cost him, he threw himself from the top of an house and perished in despair^b. This conquest of the impostor opened the eyes of many, and brought them over to a resolute confession of the faith, notwithstanding Christianity at that time lay under the severest interdicts.

This contention therefore between idolatry and Christianity, in the persons and miracles of Simon and the apostles, is thought to be designed here by the respective patrons of those causes, Michael and the dragon, fighting with each other¹. The conversions that followed hereupon, and the confusion of Simon's adherents, to be *the casting out of that dragon, and establishment of the kingdom and power of Christ*². The false accusation of the brethren, to mean the scandal brought upon Christianity by that Gnostic principle and practice of renouncing Christ in time of danger. The overcoming this *by the blood of the Lamb, and the lives not loved unto death*³, to import the vindication of

^a Ver. 8.^c Ver. 11.^f Ver. 10—12.² Dr. Hammond. Grotius Catech. vi. 9.^b Arnob. adv. Gent. l. ii.¹ Ver. 7, 8.³ Ver. 9, 10.¹ Ver. 11.

the Christian doctrines, by sacrificing themselves in testimony to the truth of them: and the *great wrath of the devil*¹, that terrible persecution to which, in revenge for so notable a defeat, he instigated Nero shortly after; and in which, as hath been formerly remarked, St. Peter and St. Paul^m, the instruments of this defeat, were both put to death.

Others againⁿ, understanding by the *woman in heaven* (ver. 1) the Christian church; and by the *man child brought forth by her, who should rule all nations*, (ver. 5,) the first Christian emperor; suppose the passage now in hand to denote the state of the Christian religion and its professors from the first beginnings of it after our Lord's ascension, answering to the time of conception and pregnancy; to the advancement of Constantine, his conquests over the other tyrants and Licinius, and the edicts of liberty and favour to the Christians, answering to the *birth* of this man child. According to this sense, *the war in heaven* implies all the struggles of the primitive saints with enemies and persecutors: *Michael and his angels*, the confessors of and champions for the gospel; *the dragon and his angels*, the idolatrous and bloody tyrants of Rome heathen, and all other persecutors of Christ in his members; *the casting out this dragon* was the overthrow of idolatry, when pagans lost the throne; *the accusations of the brethren*, those abominable, but altogether groundless calumnies, cast by the worshippers and slaves of the dragon upon the Christians and their religion; which made the many noble apologies, written by the Fathers, so necessary: and *the wrath of the devil*, when thus subdued, exerted itself in the violence of some succeeding emperors, the heresies and discords sown among Christians, and all the miseries consequent upon the inundation of barbarous nations, which tore in pieces the Roman empire itself.

4. The last construction of this place that I shall mention is theirs who apply it, in the most literal sense, to the expulsion of the devil and his angels from the seats of light and bliss, after their rebellion against God. The crime whereof the devil was guilty originally seems, from several passages of Scripture, to have been pride; an overvalue of, and too great self-complacency in, the excellencies of his nature and condition. Such as, instead of disposing him to a grateful obedience, lifted up his mind to a vain affectation of equality with, at least independence upon, God, the giver and source of all his good. To this first of all transgressions some have applied the son of Sirach's words^o; *The beginning of pride is when one departeth from God, and his heart is turned away from his Maker. For pride is, or (for so it may be rendered) was, the beginning of sin*: and those of St. Paul, who gives this reason why a *novice* ought not to be made a *bishop*, *lest being lifted up with pride he fall into the condemnation of the devil*^p; that is, from resembling the devil in his fault, come to resemble him in his punishment. And those two prophecies of Isaiah and Ezekiel^q, though the historical sense of the former do doubtless concern Nebuchadnezzar, yet he there, and the prince of Tyre in the latter, are plainly described with such marks of elation as exactly, and in their literal

¹ Ver. 12. ^m See St. Paul and St. Peter's day. ⁿ Mr. Mede. Whiston. ^o Eccles. x. 12, 13.
^p 1 Tim. iii. 6. ^q Isaiah xiv; Ezek. xxviii.

sense, agree with what ancient tradition hath delivered down as a received opinion concerning the fallen angels. And indeed the devil's aspiring after equality with God was abundantly manifested afterwards in his tempting men chiefly to idolatry; that so, by their false worship of him, this vanity might, in earth at least, be gratified.

Now that tempting and corrupting of mankind are effects of the *wrath* mentioned ver. 12; whereby the ancient writers understand his envy to have been a second crime, naturally subsequent to the former¹. The object of this envy, they all consent, is *mankind*: but about the occasion that provoked it there is some difference. Some impute it to God's making this creature, taken out of the dust of the earth, after his *own image*, and giving him dominion over his fellow-creatures here below. Others², to God's designing heaven and immortality for man, and the enjoyment of those blissful glories of the Divine presence, as a supply of inhabitants, when he and his wicked accomplices had for their offence been cast out. Others will have it to proceed from an indignation conceived at the unspeakable honour intended us in the redemption of the world. When the Son, *God blessed for ever*³, should not take upon him the nature of angels, but should take upon him the seed of Abraham⁴; that, in prospect of this, he rebelled first in heaven, and hath, in resentment for its being done, ever since employed his utmost efforts upon earth to counterwork and interrupt the prosperity and peace of Christ's kingdom. So differently does pride judge of greatness from what in truth it is; for goodness and love are the truly great accomplishments of an intelligent mind. Infinitely more so than power and all the formidable appearances of awful distance and disdain can produce. As therefore the kindness and tender compassion, so likewise the majesty and unconceivable excellencies of God never shone so bright as in the condescensions of his Son incarnate. To be born, and live meanly, and die ignominiously for the sins of them who were thus made brethren, of the same race and blood, was unparalleled greatness, because unparalleled goodness. It was an honour done to human nature at which the good angels rejoice: a mystery which, we are told, they *desire and delight to look into*⁵: a mercy *promised before the world began*⁶; and consequently declared and communicated to some beings before the creation of mankind; and a dispensation which should not, and, except when looked upon by evil angels through the false glasses of pride and envy, could not, be judged either an injury to the angelical or an indignity to the Divine nature.

And yet against this dispensation, only as such, the malice and rage of these fallen angels is very probably thought to set itself. At least, since that fall, we know how the case stands. That both our Lord and his apostles frequently declare the irreconcilable enmity between the kingdom of Christ and that of Satan⁷; the necessity of renouncing all faith and friendship with the one, whensoever we enter into covenant with the other; the treachery and subtlety and the in-

¹ Iren. lib. 4. cap. 78. Tertull. de Patient. sect. 12. ² Rom. ix. 5. ³ Heb. ii. 16.

⁴ Matt. xii. 26. vi. 24; 2 Cor. vi. 14, 15.

⁵ See Petav. Dogm. tom. 3. lib. 1. cap. 2.

⁶ 1 Pet. i. 12.

⁷ 2 Tim. i. 9; Tit. i. 2.

defatigable application of our common adversary^a; the danger of being dismayed by the roarings of this *devouring lion*^b, and the no less danger of being beguiled by the counterfeit beauties of this pretended *angel of light*^c. In short, the faith and practice of the Christian religion is the sure destruction of his power, and of all the wicked designs he labours to advance by it. And therefore this, it is manifest, he does his utmost to obstruct; by persecutions and calumnies from without; by heretical doctrines and uncharitable divisions within; by all the impudence of profaneness and irreligion, deism and scepticism; and every art that may be of service for invalidating the authority and perverting the sense of Scripture. As knowing, if the glory of the gospel and the mysteries of our redemption can be eclipsed and brought into contempt, that the love of God will wax cold, and the incentives to piety and virtue, built upon these doctrines as on their proper foundation, must needs be shaken and fall with them. So certainly may we gather whose instruments they are, and what design they carry on, who pour out their invectives upon the Christian institution; and, by persuading us out of the belief, would rob us of the benefits of our Lord's incarnation, satisfaction, and sacrifice for sins, and of the ordinances by him appointed, as means and conditions, for conveying to each of us respectively a personal right in the mighty things done in behalf of and of sufficient virtue for all mankind in common.

Meanwhile, the only possible method for baffling the attempts made against the cause of religion in general, and the salvation of each man in particular, is that mentioned here: *The blood of the Lamb, the word of testimony, and lives not loved unto death*. Affiance in our Saviour's sufferings, a firm belief of his gospel, and resisting, if occasion be, even unto blood for the truth's sake: these are the weapons of our spiritual warfare. By the force of these, Christianity hath sustained itself, preserved its purity, triumphed over both the frauds of its corrupters and the cruelties of its persecutors, and will, we trust, continue so to do to the world's end.

Undertaking to be wise in matters of religion beyond that which is written can be neither safe nor becoming. But what hath been delivered on this subject will, I hope, be readily acquitted both of hazard and immodesty. For that some of the *angels* did *sin*^d, and *were cast out of Heaven*^e, the Scripture is express. The particulars of their rebellion and punishment (being a subject of no great use or concern to us) are not indeed described at large. The several allusions to and applications of this matter to other subjects do however imply and presuppose a sense of literal and historical truth as their basis and support. And the quality and occasion of the crimes that sunk them into hell seem, if not plain and necessary, yet at least probable and fair, deductions from the hints and touches left us in holy writ. Which, how slight and remote soever, will yet bear us out, I am sure, in the few practical reflections with which I am now about to conclude this discourse.

First, the never-ceasing malice of the devil and his angels, which

^a 1 Pet. v. 8.

^b 2 Cor. xi. 3.

^c Ver. 14.

^d 2 Pet. ii. 4.

^e Jude 6.

the former interpretations of this Scripture took notice of, should awaken every man's care, and put all Christians upon their guard against so active and powerful an enemy. What succours and encouragements may be expected in these combats, I shall have occasion to observe upon the Gospel of the day. My design at present is to excite men's diligence, from the consideration of their danger, and the example of their enemies. And how can we be secure, after so many monuments of souls lost and undone, purely by flattering themselves with an imaginary safety? And why should our concern and endeavours be less zealous in our own preservation than those of our adversaries are to compass our destruction? The devil hath no real profit in his pains, nor is there any fruit possible to be reaped from them, save only the barbarous joy of having more companions in his guilt and misery: but we fight for heaven and happiness, our all is at stake, and no medium left us between triumphing in glory, and lamenting our defeat in torments everlasting.

Again, as this consideration should make us vigilant for ourselves, so should it for the truth of religion and the people of God in general. Vice of all kinds is most effectually introduced by loosening and debauching men in their principles. And as ill morals put men upon corrupting the faith, so faith once corrupted naturally degenerates into profligate conversation. In those heresies particularly which pervert the doctrines of our Lord's incarnation and satisfaction, the very sinews of piety are cut asunder, by restraining the benefit of the Messiah's coming to instruction and example only. This must needs damp the gratitude and ardent zeal, the humble adoration and holy wonder, arising from the contemplations of God incarnate emptying himself for our sakes. This makes but poor provision against the reproaches of guilt and dismal apprehensions of future punishment, in comparison of that peace of conscience which penitent sinners find from a firm reliance on the merits and acceptance of an all-sufficient sacrifice offered in their stead. This (once more) unties the strongest band of love, and gives up the noblest and most unanswerable motive to mutual and generous beneficence among men, by eluding the force of such texts as these: *Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another*¹: and, *Hereby perceive we the love of God, because he laid down his life for us: and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren*.

So great account must the enemy of God and all goodness needs find in sowing the seeds of heresy: and so false is that suggestion of his, (for it ought to be looked on as no better,) that the articles of our faith are merely speculative notions, without use or importance for the improvement of our virtue. Whereas it were easy, I conceive, to shew that every one of those mysteries, treated with so much scorn in these days of libertinism, when pursued through all its just consequences, is of mighty influence; and hath a direct tendency to regulating the manners and passions of mankind, whether we consider them in their private capacities or as united in societies. Sad experience hath proved how miserably the peace of the world hath been

disturbed by corruptions in points of belief; how close they have ever been followed by scandalous corruption of manners; and how much greater prejudice was done to the reputation and true spirit of Christianity by this artifice than ever the continued persecutions of three hundred years were able to effect before. All which renders St. Jude's exhortation of universal and perpetual obligation, that we *should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints*^b. The truth of religion is a common cause, the best and most concerning cause of any. When therefore this is insulted and broke in upon, all its professors should come forth as one man in the defence of it. Neutrality and indifference are more blamable here than in any dispute of temporal rights whatsoever. And they who, under any specious pretences, sit still, and do not in their respective stations exert a vigorous zeal in discountenancing, opposing, suppressing the insolence and impiety of profane and licentious revilers of Christ and his institution, are enemies to the public, abettors of the devil and his instruments, and can never answer such lukewarmness either to the body of which they are members in this world, or to God and their own consciences in the next.

2. The last and literal sense of this scripture (which by referring it to the fall of the angels seems best to answer the church's design in the use of it on this festival) may be serviceable to us in several respects.

As, first, (for that cannot be inculcated too often,) by making us duly sensible of the spiritual hazards to which we stand exposed. If beings so far superior to us in wisdom and power, disengaged from such bodies and their affections as we bear about with us, happy in the presence of God, and highly advanced in the court of heaven; if these glorious spirits, provoked by no ill persuasion or example from without, did yet sin, and so highly incense Almighty God as by him to be laid under an irrevocable decree to everlasting darkness and torments; how should we poor worms betray our deluded souls by vain imaginations of safety, and the carelessness naturally consequent thereupon; whose very wisdom is folly, and our strength weakness! we, who, when we would rise above the world and its vanities, find ourselves dragged back again, and fastened down by the flesh and the weight of its appetites! we, who in this conflict between spirit and sense are situated in the enemy's country, amidst stratagems and ambuscades, obliged to be daily conversant with the instruments and occasions of our ruin; and supported in the fight, not by present fruition, but distant prospects only, of a happiness which, while in this state of trial, it is our virtue and our defence continually to thirst and pant after! But especially we, who, besides the original weakness of our minds, the natural tendency of bodily inclinations, the constant impression of objects from without, the corrupt bias of our now depraved state, and the never-ceasing solicitations of a tempter who takes the advantage of all the rest against us; how monstrously stupid should we be to live without thought, without apprehension of the death hanging over our heads, when instructed by the dismal fate of

an order of beings so much more likely to stand, and yet so miserable by their fall !

So reasonable and necessary it is that the fate of evil angels should rouse us out of sleep, and quicken our care. But then, to render that care effectual, it is no less necessary to reflect upon their fault too, and what it was that caused them to fall. Now this, we have seen, was pride. The properties whereof are, an inordinate value of any real or supposed excellencies, by attributing the merit, the praise of them, to one's self; forgetfulness of and unthankfulness to the Author and Giver of them; discontent with the present state of things; aspiring and grasping after more and higher, as his supposed due; and envy at the advantages of all others. By which vile complication of qualities it is manifest that pride hath in its own nature the seeds and principles of rebellion, and is the source of malice, contention, and every evil work.

It should raise in us a yet greater detestation of this vice, that not angels only, but mankind also fell by it. The aspiring to be like gods, and affecting to know what God thought fit to be concealed from them, was the prevailing temptation urged by him who, from his own experience, had learned on what side a rational soul is most successfully attacked. The same disdain of continuing ignorant in matters above our comprehension hath been the bitter root of all the heresies and schisms that ever infested the Church. And if the fomentors of these have at any time been persons of a severe conversation, yet will not even this break the force of that maxim, that the indulgence of vicious dispositions is the true cause of corrupt doctrines. For it is a great mistake to think all those men virtuous who are not sunk into carnality or excess. These indeed have more of the beast, and are sins of the body. But the sins of the mind have more of danger, though usually less of reproach. And they were undone by striving to be more than angels, whose nature was not capable of the vices which make us less than men. Vanity, self-conceit, and not submitting to allow any other wiser and better than themselves, could debauch even heavenly beings. And earth was made a scene of misery by an inordinate desire of that which to desire regularly, and possess humbly, is the greatest accomplishment of a wise and good man. So far are they from being truly wise or mortified who are yet untaught to be content with *thinking soberly*, and have not ceased to be *wise in their own conceits*: so much ought we to be upon our guard against the extravagancies of this vice; so careful to crush this cockatrice in the egg, which extracts poison out of our very virtues, could shed its venom even in heaven, and by a most pernicious fruitfulness hath engendered and propagated sin and destruction over all parts and ages of the world.

But, thirdly, while we contemplate the wisdom and justice of God in permitting and punishing the sin of evil angels, and all the dire effects of their malice to mankind, let us by no means forget the difference his mercy hath put between their case and that of sinners tempted by them. It is true, they offended against a light infinitely clearer, without the impulse of any suggester; and consequently they

sinned with more perverseness as well as baser ingratitude. But all these and any other aggravations notwithstanding, it is to the free and unbounded mercy of God that we owe the redemption of men; while spirits, once so much higher in dignity, and so much more nearly allied to the Divine nature, are left under hopeless and irrecoverable condemnation. For who can sufficiently adore the kindness and compassion which passed by this glorious order of beings, and did not disdain to assume the flesh and blood of poor feeble mortals into the Godhead, that by becoming one of them he might exalt them to that state from which their betters by transgression fell?

Their hearts, which turned themselves away from God, are finally left in that alienation. Our alienation is chosen too; but yet we are not given over to sin. The Spirit of God strives with us, and by his sweet attractives regulates our affections when warped, helps us to be sensible of and sorry for our follies, and brings the prodigals back to their right mind. One fault drove them out of the beatific presence of God; but that one (the grace of repentance not being granted) productive of infinite more, and so at once the increase both of their guilt and misery. We, after many, may obtain an entrance there: and though our sins be red as crimson, and more than the hairs of our head¹, yet may they be white as snow, when washed in that blood of the Lamb² by which the victory was gained over the devil and his accomplices, making war in heaven. That blood which overcomes him no less in the quality of our enemy than God's.

It is true, as such he is not only his own, but, to the utmost of his ability, our destroyer. And how perilous our condition is upon that account hath been already noted³. But though earth be now become the seat of war, and our whole life a season of perpetual action; though our adversary be mighty, and our frail selves by no means a match for him; yet are we not left in his, no, nor, blessed be God, altogether in our own hands. Powerful auxiliaries are appointed to sustain us, equal in strength and sagacity to the foes we combat with. But the quality and service of the heavenly hosts, the great variety of good offices done by them, and the uses proper to be made of their readiness to assist in our extremities, I forbear to say more of here; because these are subjects reserved for a particular consideration upon the Gospel for this day.

THE GOSPEL. St. Matt. xviii. 1.

¹ *At the same time came the disciples unto Jesus, saying, Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?*

² *And Jesus called a little child unto him, and set him in the midst of them,*

³ *And said, Verily I say unto you, Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven.*

⁴ *Whosoever therefore shall humble himself as this little child, the same is greatest in the kingdom of heaven.*

¹ Isaiah i. 18; Psalm xl. 12.

² Rev. xii. 7, 11.

³ See Gospel for the first Sunday in Lent; also the Epistle for St. Philip and St. James.

5 *And whoso shall receive one such little child in my name receiveth me.*

6 *But whoso shall offend one of these little ones which believe in me, it were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and that he were drowned in the depth of the sea.*

7 *Woe unto the world because of offences! for it must needs be that offences come; but woe to that man by whom the offence cometh!*

8 *Wherefore if thy hand or thy foot offend thee, cut them off, and cast them from thee: it is better for thee to enter into life halt or maimed, rather than having two hands or two feet to be cast into everlasting fire.*

9 *And if thine eye offend thee, pluck it out, and cast it from thee: it is better for thee to enter into life with one eye, rather than having two eyes to be cast into hell fire.*

10 *Take heed that ye despise not one of these little ones; for I say unto you, That in heaven their angels do always behold the face of my Father which is in heaven.*

COMMENT.

THAT part of the Scripture now before us which comes up to our present purpose, and seems to have entitled it to a part in the service for this day, I take to lie in those words of our Saviour at the tenth verse, *Take heed that ye despise not one of these little ones; for I say unto you, That in heaven their angels do always behold the face of my Father which is in heaven.* In order to a right understanding whereof it will be necessary to satisfy three inquiries, which may supply the place of a paraphrase upon the whole. For it cannot be expected that we should bear due respect to the command contained there till it be made appear,

I. First, who the *little ones* are, mentioned here.

II. Secondly, what is meant by *despising* them.

III. Thirdly, and especially, wherein the force of that reason consists, for which it is said we ought not so to do, viz. because *in heaven their angels do always behold the face of Almighty God.*

I. First then, let us examine who those *little ones* are which our blessed Saviour with so much solemnity forbids us to treat any of with contempt; *Take heed that ye despise not one of these little ones.*

We read, in the beginning of this chapter, that the disciples applied themselves to Jesus with a desire to be resolved, *Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?* Which question, proceeding from an ambitious strife and desire of preeminence above their brethren, our Lord willing to rebuke, gives them a sensible representation of the excellencies which distinguish men under the gospel state, by calling a *little child*^m, and setting him in the midst, as a pattern to his disciples. And, lest they should neglect to make the application, he declares expressly, that the resemblance of such infant innocence, in meekness and gentleness and harmless simplicity of mind, was a proper and necessary qualification for his kingdom: that however such a temper might fail of esteem, or perhaps meet with derision and reproach among men, yet God, he says, hath a true value and very high regard for it. Hence it must follow that they ought to be exceeding careful not to offend or despise

the meanest, most despicable Christians; whom, for their likeness to that child then propounded to them for an example, he does both here and at the sixth verse distinguish by the title of *little ones*; and *those little ones which believe in him*.

II. The next thing therefore to be considered is, what our Lord intends by *despising* these meek and lowly Christians. And this is likewise easy to be gathered from those parts of the discourse that went before. Our Saviour there warns men against offences, and particularly charges his disciples not to give any. Now this, in the gospel sense of the word, is done when we minister to our brethren occasions of sin, or discourage them in the performance of their duty. And because the doing either of these argues a want of becoming tenderness for their souls' good; and that want of tenderness proceeds from want of a due value for their persons, as not thinking them worth our concern; therefore our Lord does here admonish men against that contempt and disregard for the safety of their souls, which either the meekness of our fellow-Christians' temper, or the meanness of their circumstances, might tempt us to treat them with. And this he does by assuring us, that however patient and slow of resentment the sufferers might be, and what security soever the offenders might support themselves with from a want of ability to revenge such wrongs and insolences, yet they had powerful friends above, and such as would not suffer these things to be so tamely put up as those despisers vainly imagined. For that is plainly the importance of the last words—*Take heed that ye despise not one of these little ones; for I say unto you, That in heaven their angels do always behold the face of my Father which is in heaven*.

III. And thus I am led to the third inquiry, which, as I said, is the main point (and most suitable to the design of this festival), in the consideration whereof it will therefore become us to be somewhat large and particular. For we shall not do justice to the argument comprehended in this reason alleged by our Saviour, without taking a distinct view of these three things:

1. First, the persons here spoken of, *the angels*.
2. Secondly, the concern they are intimated to have for these *little ones*, and the relation they bear to them: they are called *their angels*.
3. Thirdly, what it is that renders the contempt of those *little ones* of so dangerous consequence upon their account, implied in those words, that these *angels* of theirs *do always behold the face of Christ's Father which is in heaven*.

First, we must observe the persons here spoken of, *the angels*. The word, in its first and proper signification, denotes no more than *messengers*. But it is now in common speech attributed, by way of excellence, to a particular sort of beings, sent and employed by Almighty God upon such weighty affairs and special occasions as I shall presently take notice of. In the meanwhile, this (being a title of office only) can give us no light at all into the nature of angels, and therefore it will be convenient to observe what descriptions the holy Scriptures have left us of them. Now there we may be satisfied, so far as is necessary for our purpose, both what they are, and how admirably

qualified for the performing those services which Almighty God is pleased to make use of them for.

Here then we are first of all informed that the angels are *spirits*^a, freed from that gross and mortal nature we have; and consequently, though they be not present in all places at once, (which none but God can be,) yet they are not clogged and limited in their motions by the same weight and the same laws of matter and bodily substance that we are; but fly swift as our very thoughts, and have an activity far greater than is easy for us to conceive. For these reasons it is that the cherubim and seraphim, which are orders or kinds of angels, are described to us with wings, and that these ministers are called *a flame of fire*. They are also said to *excel in strength and wisdom*^b; and the different ranks of them are styled *thrones and dominions and principalities and powers*; for thus St. Paul reckons up the invisible parts of the creation, (Coloss. i. 16.) And that there are distinctions and degrees among them is plain, not from hence only, but from Michael being expressly styled an archangel, and said to have other angels under his conduct, whom he led on to fight *P*.

Thus much is common to angels in general, and of both sorts. For we are further taught that they are of two sorts; *angels of light* and *a heavenly host*^c; and *angels of darkness* and *the bottomless pit*^d: *holy angels*^e, and *evil angels*^f: *the angels of the Lord*^g, and *the angels of the devil*^h: some, who *kept not their first estate, but left their own habitation, and are reserved in everlasting chains under darkness unto the judgment of the great day*ⁱ; and others, that *wait continually about the thrones of God, hearkening to the voice of his word*^j, and *ministering unto him*, as he sees fit. And of these, because this text (as well as this festival) is chiefly concerned with them, I shall add these few further remarks.

These, we are assured, are vastly numerous: *thousand thousands*, and *ten thousand times ten thousand*^k; and the author to the Hebrews calls them *an innumerable company*^l. Wonderfully diligent in the business committed to their charge; and therefore called his *hosts* and *armies*^m, the servants that *fulfil his commandments and do his pleasure*. And what they are principally employed about the apostle hath told us, when he calls them *ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation*ⁿ. That is, God makes these the instruments and ministers of his good providence, for the eternal advantage of his chosen and faithful. Their office is executed, sometimes by guiding them in difficulties, as in the case of Abraham's steward^o and Jacob's flight^p; sometimes, by preventing their sins and calamities, as it was with Hagar and Balaam^q; sometimes, by warning them of dangers, and assisting them in the proper means of escape; as in the case of Lot at the destruction of Sodom^r; and of Joseph and the

^a Psalm civ. 4. ^b Isaiah vi.; Ezek. i. 6, 8, 11, x. 19, 21; Psalm civ. 4; Psalm ciii. 20;
^c Sam. xiv. 20. ^d Jude 9; Rev. xii. 7. ^e 2 Cor. xi. 14; Luke ii. 13. ^f Rev. ix. 1, 11.
^g Matt. xxv. 31. ^h Psalm lxxviii. 49. ⁱ Matt. xvi. 27. ^j Rev. xii. 7. ^k Matt.
xxv. 41; Jude 6. ^l Rev. v. 11; Psalm ciii. 20. ^m Dan. vii. 10. ⁿ Heb. xii. 22.
^o Gen. xxiii. 2; Psalm ciii. 20, 21. ^p Heb. i. 14. ^q Gen. xxiv. 7. ^r Gen. xxviii. 12, 15,
xxiii. 1. ^s Gen. xvi. 9. xxii. 1, 24, &c. ^t Matt. i. 20; Num. xxii. 22; Gen. xix.

wise men from the east, when Herod sought Jesus his lifeⁱ: sometimes, by assuring them of unexpected deliverances; as in the case of Gideon and Samson^k, and St. Paul in his shipwreck^l: sometimes, by being the good man's protection and guard, from the enemies or the casualties that threaten him; and thus David says^m, *The angel of the Lord encampeth round about them that fear him, and delivereth them*; and, *He shall give his angels charge over thee, to keep thee in all thy ways. They shall bear thee up in their hands, lest at any time thou dash thy foot against a stone*. Sometimes they are made the executioners of vengeance upon wicked men; as in the destruction of Sodomⁿ; the pestilence sent upon Israel for David's numbering the people^p; the *hundred and fourscore and five thousand Assyrians*, cut off in one night by the hand of a destroying angel^q: and in the case of Herod^r, smitten by an angel for receiving the blasphemous acclamations of his flatterers. Besides these and many other instances, we are taught that the angels are present at our worship^s; that they conduct the souls of pious men when they die, as they did Lazarus^t, into the seats of bliss appointed for them; that at the last great day they shall summon mankind, and gather them to judgment^u; and, after sentence passed, shall cast the wicked into a furnace of fire, their place of everlasting torture and punishment^v.

So various are the offices in which the good angels are employed, so constant their attendance in the execution of their great Master's orders, that many have believed their ministry made use of in all the disposals of Providence, and the continual government of the world. An imperfect notion of this matter seems to have been the ground of the heathen idolatry; at least so far as it believed a number of inferior deities, assisting and directed by the one supreme God, by him appointed to particular stations, and endued with a limited power. Insomuch that the concern in all human affairs which the Scriptures attribute to angels, belonging to a sort of excellent and spiritual beings, far superior to us, but subordinate to God, seems to have been a constant and universal tradition both among the Jews and Gentiles. And its being so generally received seems to be the very reason why the Old and New Testament both are not more particular and express in the explanation of their condition and employment; it being sufficient only to relate some particular facts of angels upon special occasions, when the sacred writers addressed to men who were already satisfied that such creatures as those there certainly were, and who allowed them capable of performing the things there ascribed to them. Now this all the Jews manifestly did, except the Sadducees only; who, when they disclaimed all immaterial spirits, found themselves obliged, in consequence of their own principle, to deny that there were angels, as we read they did, Acts xxiii. 8. In a word, the presence of God seems to have been exhibited by visions of angels; the guardian of the Israelites in the wilderness is called *the angel of*

ⁱ Matt. ii. 12. 19. ^k Judges vi. 11. xiii. 5. ^l Acts xvii. 23. ^m Psalm xxiv. 7.
ⁿ Psalm xxi. 11, 12. ^p Gen. xix. ^q 2 Sam. xxiv. ^r Isaiah xxxvii. 36. ^s Acts xii. 23.
^t 1 Cor. xi. 10; Eccles. v. 6. ^u Luke xvi. 22. ^v Matt. xxiv. 31. ^w Matt. xiii. 41, 49.

his presence; the law delivered in mount Sinai is said by St. Stephen to have been *received by the disposition of angels*². And visible they thus became by taking upon them some bodily shape; as we find particularly they did that of a human form, when coming to Abraham^a and Lot^b and Manoah^c, and upon sundry other occasions. To be short, it hath been generally thought that the angels have so very great a share in the administration of human affairs, as to have particular persons assigned to them for their charge. Which brings me to the second thing,

2. The concern they are here intimated to have for these *little ones*, or the relation they bear to them, in that they are called *their angels*. A like expression we have in the book of Acts, when Peter was miraculously released out of prison, and came to Mary's house, where the disciples were met and joining in prayer. The servant that brought in word that Peter spoke to her at the gate was answered that it could not be he, but *was his angel*^d. Now how far soever this might be strained beyond the true importance of the words, yet thus much, I think, without any wresting, it must be allowed to infer, that not only the Jews, but the first Christians too, were of opinion that the angels took a more than ordinary care of good men. I do not at present contend for that doctrine of a guardian angel assigned to each particular person as his proper protector; though there be great authorities of learned men in behalf of that also, and many who have looked upon it as sufficiently asserted in these two passages. But whether that angel who unlocked the prison doors and set Peter at liberty, whether that which was supposed to be his angel had other saints under his care besides Peter, or whether Peter might have more angels than one concerned for his preservation; thus much, methinks, we may fairly infer, that those Christians who thus expressed themselves made no doubt of his having some angel that took care of him. I am very sensible how easy it is to mistake in such matters as these, relating to the actions of creatures above us; and such as we have no means of acquainting ourselves with, farther than Almighty God, who distributes to each of these ministers his business, hath thought fit to let us into the knowledge of them and their doings. I would not therefore advance any thing in which the Scriptures have been silent. They give us no foundation for that conceit of Origen, that every man, from his birth, hath a good and an evil angel attending him: the one with all his might labouring his hurt and ruin; the other countermining those designs, and, with equal industry, promoting his safety and happiness. They do not perhaps give us sufficient warrant to conclude that every man, or even every good man, hath one angel distinctly to himself. But yet thus much the Scripture does in the point; it makes it very probable that nations and churches have their respective angels, from that account of Gabriel, and the prince of Persia in Daniel^e: it assures us, that the great and proper business of the good angels is to be assisting to *them who shall be heirs of salvation*^f: it describes their kind regard and affections, and

^a Isaiah lxiii. 9. ^b Acts vii. 53. ^c Gen. xvii, xviii. ^d Gen. xix. ^e Judges xiii.

^f Acts xii. 15.

^g Dan. x. 13.

^h Heb. i. 14.

earnest desire for the good of our souls; not only by that universal joy for the redemption of the world, expressed in hymns of praise by a multitude of this *heavenly host* at the birth of our adorable Redeemer^f, but by affirming that they rejoice at the repentance of any *one sinner*^g. It seems, in this very place, to declare that no sincere good man whatsoever is destitute of the protection and tender care of angels. It asserts their constant readiness to observe what happens to good men; to do them right, or to represent the wrongs and indignities offered to them; and to make use of those opportunities which their constant fruition of the Divine presence gives them for the benefit even of the meanest and most humble Christian. For that is the sense and design of our Lord, evidently, and beyond all reasonable contradiction; and leads me to the third particular, namely,

3. What it is that renders the contempt of any one of Christ's *little ones* of so dangerous consequence; which is, that *their angels do always in heaven behold the face of Almighty God*. The only difficulty in this point is, what we are to understand by *always beholding God's face*. The most probable, and I think the most approved, interpretation whereof I shall lay down as follows:

Nothing is more frequent in the writings of the New Testament than to shadow out to us the condition of Christ's spiritual kingdom, and the privileges of the saints, by similitudes taken from the usages and proceedings of earthly princes. Thus, because the right hand is the place of honour among men, and coming nearest the person of the prince, being admitted to his table, sitting with him in judicature, &c., argues a preference above them who are kept at a greater distance; the highest advancement in Christ's kingdom is painted out to us by such figures as *sitting on his right hand and on his left*^h: the authority of the apostles, by *sitting on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel*ⁱ: the happiness and high honour of their future state, by *eating and drinking with him at his table in his kingdom*^k. And many other such resemblances there are, which must not be expounded in their strict and literal sense, just as the words sound, but according to the proportion they bear to these customs and privileges among men.

In like manner, as in earthly courts it is a mark of favour and interest and great power with the king to be continually in his presence, in constant attendance upon his royal person, and without any difficulty to approach, and have the honour of his ear; so our Lord, by saying that these *angels always behold the face of God*, implies, that they were not only such as are of the lowest degree, and least interest, but angels of the first quality, and peculiar favourites in the court of heaven. Again; as men are well aware how great a risk they run in injuring or affronting any person whose interest the prince's bosom friend or principal officer espouses zealously; so they are warned here to take heed how they offend or despise any of these *little ones*, who have such potent patrons with the King of heaven. And once more; as the monarchs of this world could give no greater demonstration of their kindness than to commit one whose safety they value to the

^f Luke ii. 13.^g Luke xv. 10.^h Matt. xx. 21, 23.ⁱ Matt. xix. 28.^k Luke xxii. 30.

care and management of a person who is always ready at hand, always permitted to represent the case of this charge of theirs, and to require speedy revenge and effectual redress for any slights or wrongs offered to him; so we are admonished here to bethink ourselves, what a danger we tempt, and to what formidable mischiefs we stand exposed, if we shall dare to despise any of those who, however little they may be in our esteem, are yet so highly prized by the King of heaven, that he hath appointed them advocates and protectors, so far from finding any difficulty of access to God on their behalf, that they *always behold his face*; that is, enjoy all the advantages of his divine presence and favour, and stand continually before his throne in *heaven*.

The true meaning then of our blessed Saviour, and that which he designed to teach us in those words, I conceive, upon the whole matter, to be this. Not to inform us that the holy angels in heaven enjoy the presence of God perpetually; nor to assure us that every good man and sincere believer is under the constant care and inspection of these spiritual guardians: (for both these things the persons to whom Christ spoke most firmly believed and took for granted before:) but he intended to shew that the very meanest, meekest, and most despicable of those *little ones* that believe in him are thought not unworthy the very solicitous concern and never-failing patronage of the highest and greatest of the angels; such as, in their power and capacity above, answer to the nobility and prime ministers of state in the courts of earthly princes. And because the consequences of slighting and injuring those who are secure of such zealous and such powerful friends must in all reason be supposed very terrible, *Therefore take heed that ye despise not one of these little ones*, says Christ; whom the great God and his servants the blessed spirits above are so far from despising, that *I say unto you, in heaven their angels do always behold the face of my Father which is in heaven*.

Thus much may suffice for the explanation and doctrinal part of that passage. It shall now be my endeavour to draw from thence some few practical inferences, suitable to the sense and intention of our blessed Lord, and such as every considering man's own mind would naturally suggest to his thoughts upon this occasion.

I. And first, can we reflect upon this wonderful economy of the angels being ministering spirits for the benefit of good men, and not feel our souls very powerfully excited to thankfulness and praise for such love and care of us? For what is man, that God should thus remember him, or the son of man, that he should give his angels such strict charge over him? That not only creatures of an inferior quality should be made for his use and service, but that spirits, so much higher and more excellent than we, should in some sort become our servants too? That these bright guards, who never slumber nor sleep, should pitch their tents round about us, and watch perpetually for the preservation of such frail helpless wretches? That our souls should be esteemed at so high a rate as to engage the host of heaven in their cause, to add to their joy, and make their heaven yet more heaven, upon every conquest we gain over sin and Satan? This is what, if we duly consider, the most stupid of us all would find a sensible change in his

affections; and could not but admire and adore the wisdom of Providence, which hath thus disposed all things for the advantage of such vile, such polluted, such unworthy creatures. Ingratitude for such distinguishing marks of favour cannot possibly be the effect of any thing else but perfect thoughtlessness and extreme insensibility. For they who think at all must be amazed at the proceeding, and, full of holy surprise, will at every turn feel David's exclamation uppermost in their minds and mouths, *Lord, what is man, that thou bearest such respect unto him, or the son of man, that thou makest such mighty account of him?*

2. But, secondly, let us be well assured that we are not thankful for this marvellous lovingkindness and condescension truly, and as we ought to be, unless we shew it by our imitation of it, as we have power and opportunity. Beloved, if God and the holy angels are so very solicitous for *our* souls, we ought also to be concerned very tenderly for *one another's* souls. Much more indeed ought we upon that very account, because they are. Our safety is owing to their care of us; and what can be greater baseness than not to impart that little assistance we are able to our brethren, when we reap such mighty benefit from the succours of others? What fouler ingratitude, than not to unite in the same glorious design of saving souls, which all heaven is unanimous in, and every good spirit so assiduously promotes? But they are removed far above us; and though man be next in order of the creatures, still betwixt us and angels' perfection we may easily perceive the distance to be very great. But yet this distance hinders not their concern for us from being expressed in the most diligent, the most profitable, the most necessary manner that the dearest and most officious affection can suggest. The most exalted and brightest of all those sons of God disclaims not the doing good offices for the meanest Christian, nor ever thinks his interest in the court of heaven better employed than when it is used in the service of any of those *little ones* whom men are so apt to despise. But shall men still despise them? Shall our superiors not think it beneath their dignity to do them good, and shall we be cold and indifferent what becomes of them? Shall they, who are of a more excellent nature, stoop so low as to watch and guard them; and shall we, of the same passions and infirmities, cast a haughty negligent look, stop our ears to their cries and complaints, value ourselves upon the vanity of a little outward pomp and wealth, and account it a disparagement to lend our helping hand? The angels are past all danger of falling; but we are in daily hazard. And if they compassionate the miseries and fears they cannot feel, how hardhearted, how insensible are we, if the wants and the dangers which every day makes our own do not move our pity, and inspire a very quick and tender sense for the poorest and most destitute fellow-Christians! In short, angels we must be, or brutes and devils, to one another. Angels we are, if we, like them, are affectionately concerned for and industrious to advance the happiness and salvation of their souls: brutes, if we feel no impression, have no regard to their sufferings and fears, their dangers and distresses: but devils,

if we be so far from endeavouring to rescue, as to engage them deeper, and entangle them yet more in the snare of the tempter by enticing them to sin, or if our hearts have so much of hell in them as even to be pleased with their wickedness, or to triumph in their miseries. Such wretches would do well even to *despise these little ones*, that is, to let them alone, and utterly disregard them, in comparison of what they now do. For to lead men into sin, and to rejoice in their ruin, is directly to counterwork the blessed angels, and to become ministers to those that shall inherit darkness and damnation.

3. Thirdly, the consideration of what hath been said concerning the holy angels, and their concern for us, may be of admirable use to encourage and fortify us in our conflicts with temptations. We readily enough acknowledge the power and subtlety and fatal diligence of the devil upon these occasions. But who is the devil? an angel, once of light, but now of darkness. And all the shining excellencies he formerly had are turned into malice and apostasy and mischief. But then let us remember, that, as our adversary is an angel, so are our guards angels also: of the same natural wisdom and activity and strength; as zealous to save, as he can be eager to destroy; as watchful and diligent in their post to defend and repulse, as he to attack and get ground upon us. If he suggest evil thoughts, they have the same power to instil good ones. And there is no reason why we should not believe the one of these to be done as well as the other. None, why they, who are by nature equal, should not have, none to suspect they do not use, all the ways of counterworking his designs, and the same methods of insinuating themselves for promoting piety, which he can possibly have for the hardening us in vice. It is true indeed, there is treachery within; the corruptions of our hearts and the infirmities of human nature render the place hardly tenable; and defended it could not be by our own strength. But do we consider what unseen guards we have, what forces in reserve? A numerous and powerful recruit, like the horses and chariots of fire round about Elisha^m, are encamped on every side us. The armies of the most high God, valiant and wise, faithful to their charge, and zealous in our defence. And if we do not forsake these succours by surrendering, but resolve to hold out the siege; though we be compassed round with enemies, yet we may encourage ourselves as that prophet did his timorous servant, who was safe, but knew it not—*Fear not, for they that be with us are more and mightier than they that be against us.*

4. Fourthly, the constant presence of these angels with us, and the knowledge they have of our actions and affairs, should make us very careful of our behaviour. Those who thought each man to have a good and an evil angel always attending him were of opinion, that when any man grew froward and perverse, and gave himself up to wickedness, the good spirit took its flight, and the evil one took entire possession of him. But however that be, it is certain these angels that guard us are spirits of holiness and purity; that they have an irreconcilable aversion to filthiness and vice; and therefore we ought by no means to provoke or grieve them by indulging such lusts and prac-

tices as they cannot but hate. Many restraints we put upon ourselves when under the observation of good or great men. And shall we not pay the same or greater deference to witnesses so much higher in quality, so much more perfect in goodness, than the best or greatest of the sons of men? Solomon makes it an argument against rash and hasty vows, that the angel is an evidence of our error^a. And St. Paul orders the women to come decently habited to church, *because of the angels*^b. Now the same reason will hold in other instances of human life. But especially we shall do well to make it a check upon us, that we carry ourselves with all comeliness and gravity and reverence in our public and private devotions. That no lightness nor negligence betray a disrespect of those who stand by us, and overlook us in these actions; and that they who *always behold our Father's face in heaven* may have no cause to think themselves affronted, or to complain of our rudeness and ill usage to them in that court above.

But, fifthly, this respect must be so tempered too, as not to run out into excess or superstition. Their knowledge of and care for us challenges our reverence; but neither this nor any thing else can demand our adoration, or render it allowable to worship and pray to them. When St. John, in a transport of indiscreet zeal, had prostrated his body before the feet of an angel, he was reprov'd, and inform'd of the unlawfulness of the thing in these very remarkable words: *See thou do it not: I am thy fellowservant, and of thy brethren that have the testimony of Jesus: worship God*^c. They are of a nature more excellent than ours, but still they are *brethren*; and we must not pay that duty to any of the children which belongs to their and our common Father only. They are our fellowservants, though servants in a higher post; but let their station be never so high, still we must preserve the distinctions which are due and peculiar to the Master of the family. To pay them no regard is ingratitude and ill-manners; but to pay them bodily adoration, and offer up our prayers to them, is injustice and sacrilege, superstition and idolatry. And therefore, *see thou do it not: worship God*. For God alone is, God alone can be, the lawful, the proper object of worship.

Lastly, from the several cases of the angels being said to assist and defend holy men in Scripture, we have reason to believe that the benefit of their protection extends not only to spiritual, but also to our temporal dangers and adversities. That they shield us from many misfortunes, prevent many sad casualties, and put by many a sore thrust which our enemies endeavour to make us fall by. To what else indeed but to such an unseen defence can we attribute the wonderful preservations of little children, the infinite escapes from sad and surprising accidents, the surprising deliverances in cases of extremity, where human helps were vain, and we had given all for lost? Our souls, it is true, are their chief care, and so they ought to be our own too. But such afflictions as it is profitable for us to be guarded from are driven away by these instruments of a good Providence towards us. Such again as it is better for us to be exercised with they give way to, and suspend the protection of our bodies, that our *souls*

^a Eccles. v. 6.^b 2 Cor. xi. 10.^c Rev. xix. 10. xxii. 9.

may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus. Let us then thank God for these bright guardians; let us imitate their diligence and condescension in doing good; let us hearten ourselves with their assistance against temptations; let us behave ourselves as becomes men under their observation, and not only pray, but endeavour daily, that the *will of our Father may be done by us upon earth* with the same cheerfulness and vigilance as it is by them in heaven. And let us beg of God, that *as they always do him service in heaven, so they may succour and defend us on earth*; and at last, when we shall leave this earth, that they may conduct us to the regions of immortal happiness, to the *innumerable company of angels*^r, where we shall be ever with them and like them. All which we may hope to obtain through the sole merits and mediation of their and our Lord and King, even Jesus Christ the righteous; who submitted for our sakes to be *made lower than the angels*^s, but is now set down at the right hand of God, *angels and authorities and powers being made subject unto him*^t. To him therefore, with the Father and the Holy Ghost, three Persons and one God, be ascribed, as is most due, all honour and glory, thanksgiving and praise, might, majesty, and dominion, henceforth and for evermore. Amen.

ST. LUKE'S DAY.

A short Account of St. Luke.

THE place of his birth was Antioch, the metropolis of Syria. A place famous for good education and the study of the liberal arts. After some improvement in these, which St. Luke is supposed to have laid as a foundation, he betook himself to physic^a. He is thought to have been converted by St. Paul at Antioch^b. A companion of whose travels and sufferings he plainly appears to have been from the time of his first going into Macedonia. Of this his change of style, including himself as a party concerned in the narrative, from Acts xvi. 10, and so forwards, is evidence clear enough. Some passages in the Epistles shew him to have been very useful and dear to that apostle; and to have continued his attendance upon him, not only to his first, but second coming to Rome, and the near approach of his martyrdom^c.

How he disposed of himself afterwards is not so certain. It is said by some that he preached in Dalmatia, Gallia, (or Galatia,) Italy, and Macedonia. By others, that he travelled into the east, Egypt, and Libya. As uncertain is the time and place and manner of his death; though it be generally believed that he suffered martyrdom about the eighty-fourth year of his age; and some affirm him to have been hanged on an olive tree^d.

That he was one of the seventy disciples, is a notion inconsistent with his own declaration at the beginning of his Gospel. For he tells us the facts there recorded, not as of his own knowledge, but as communicated to him by those who were eyewitnesses. Which also over-

^a See Collect. ^r Heb. xii. 22. ^s Heb. ii. 7, 9. ^t 1 Pet. iii. 22. ^a Coloss. iv. 14.
^b Chrysost. t. vii. Orat. 95. ^c 2 Cor. viii. 18, 19; 2 Tim. iv. 11. ^d Hieron. Catal. Script.

throws their opinion who suppose it dictated to him by St. Paul. The time of writing this is reasonably concluded to have been before the sending of St. Paul's Second Epistle to the Corinthians. For upon this account it is that he hath generally been thought to be there styled *the brother whose praise is in the gospel*^c. Which treatise, if it were meant by St. Paul, when he says, *Jesus Christ was raised from the dead according to my gospel*^f, the sense of those, I take it, must be, that it was approved by him, and in all points agreeable to the doctrine which he preached, and had learned by revelation. And thus we may understand Eusebius^g, when he says, St. Luke committed to writing the gospel preached by St. Paul. The occasion of this undertaking himself intimates to have been the rash and wrong accounts given to the world by some (the Corinthian heretics probably) who had, either ignorantly or presumptuously, misrepresented the actions and doctrines of Christ, and sowed the seeds of error in the church. He is more circumstantial in relating the facts, and more exact in the method and order of them, than either of the two evangelists who wrote before him; in all probability for the reason last mentioned.

The book of Acts is also of his composure; written at Rome, and designed for a continuation of his former history^h. To this we owe the account of the first miraculous effusions of the Holy Spirit, and the mighty effects consequent thereupon. Which book, containing the accomplishment of our Lord's parting promises, the laying the foundations of his Church, and the evidences of his glory and exaltation, the Church heretofore thought it proper to have read in her public assemblies, between the feasts of Easter and Pentecost, or Whitsuntide.

These books are both addressed to Theophilus, who by the style of *most excellent* is supposed to have been a person of eminence and authority, and possibly one of Antioch, converted by St. Lukeⁱ.

THE COLLECT.

ALMIGHTY God, who calledst Luke the physician, whose praise is in the gospel, to be an evangelist, and physician of the soul^k; May it please thee, that, by the wholesome medicines of the doctrine delivered by him, all the diseases of our souls may be healed; through the merits of thy Son Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

THE EPISTLE. 2 Tim. iv. 5.

5 Watch thou in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, make full proof of thy ministry.

6 For I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand.

5, 6. Be vigilant and patient, diligent in every part of thy office: not discouraged, but rather quickened, by my danger and death.

^e 2 Cor. viii. 18.

^f 2 Tim. ii. 8.

^g Hist. lib. iii. cap. 8.

^h Hieron. Catal. Script.

ⁱ Theophylact

^k Col. iv. 14; 2 Cor. viii. 18.

7 *I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith :*

8 *Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing.*

9 *Do thy diligence to come shortly unto me, to the day of Christ's coming,*

10 *For Demas hath forsaken me, having loved this present world, and is departed unto Thessalonica; Crescens to Galatia, Titus unto Dalmatia.*

11 *Only Luke is with me. Take Mark, and bring him with thee: for he is profitable to me for the ministry.*

12 *And Tychicus have I sent to Ephesus.*

13 *The cloak that I left at Troas with Carpus, when thou comest, bring with thee, and the books, but especially the parchments.*

14 *Alexander the coppersmith did me much evil: the Lord reward him according to his works:*

15 *Of whom be thou ware also; for he hath greatly withstood our words.*

7,8. The approach whereof I can see with joy, supported by the testimony of my conscience, the remembrance of my past sincerity and sufferings, and the prospect of a glorious reward, reserved for me, to the day of Christ's coming, and general distribution.

10. Demas, willing to secure his person, hath left me in this time of danger.

11. Luke sticks close to me, and is not dismayed at my sufferings.

COMMENT.

THIS portion of Scripture seems to have been now chosen on account of the commendation of St. Luke's constancy, ver. 11, by which he distinguished himself at a very trying time. Of that, notice hath been taken already: and no other subject offering itself which hath not already been spoken to, I pass forward to the Gospel.

THE GOSPEL. St. Luke x. 1.

1 *The Lord appointed other seventy also, and sent them two and two before his face into every city and place, whither he himself would come.*

2 *Therefore said he unto them, The harvest truly is great, but the labourers are few: pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he would send forth labourers into his harvest.*

3 *Go your ways: behold, I send you forth as lambs among wolves.*

4 *Carry neither purse, nor scrip, nor*

1. Seventy.] Of a second order, and inferior to the twelve apostles.

3. The message I send you upon is full of danger, but I, who send you, will protect you in it.

4. Depend upon me for

shoes: and salute no man by the way. provision, and make no preparation, nor lose time in unnecessary delays. *Saluting no man, &c.* is a phrase intimating all possible dispatch to be made. (See 2 Kings iv. 29.)

5 *And into whatsoever house ye enter, first say, Peace be to this house.* 5, 6. Implore a blessing on the houses you come to, which ye shall do with good effect, if the family be well-disposed; but if otherwise, they shall have no benefit by your prayers.

6 *And if the son of peace be there, your peace shall rest upon it: if not, it shall turn to you again.*

7 *And in the same house remain, eating and drinking such things as they give: for the labourer is worthy of his hire. Go not from house to house.* 7. Let not niceness or curiosity carry you to change, but remain contented with the entertainment you find.

For which they, who so receive you, will not think you indebted, for your ministry deserves this return at their hands.

COMMENT.

In discoursing upon this passage, I shall confine my thoughts principally to those words at the second verse; which our blessed Saviour saw so important, as, after having spoken them at the first mission of the twelve apostles, to repeat them here again at the sending out the seventy disciples. Upon this occasion I will,

First, explain the terms in which our Lord delivered himself: and then, secondly, I shall raise such observations and inferences from thence as may be useful and improving to us.

1. In order to a right understanding of the words, it will be necessary to inquire into these four things:

First, what is meant by *the harvest* in the text.

Secondly, who are *the labourers* here.

Thirdly, who is *the Lord* of that harvest; and,

Lastly, after what manner he *sends forth his labourers into it.*

1. As to the first of these, what is meant by *the harvest*. We read indeed of a harvest in the parable of the tares¹, which answers to the end of the world; and the reapers to the angels, who shall then gather all mankind together to judgment. But this here is of a quite different nature; and no great question can be made, but the bringing in the yet unbelieving part of the world, and particularly the Jews, to the acknowledgment of the truth and the church of Christ, is intended by it. Now the propriety of this metaphorical expression may very easily appear to us, if we consider the mutual resemblances which these two things bear to each other.

The harvest, we know, is the season of gathering in ripe fruits; and supposes not only the labour of tillage and seedtime, but all those other advantages of good soil and kindly weather to have gone before, which are necessary for bringing the crop to its just perfection. Thus the propagation of the gospel is very fitly termed *the harvest*; with regard to the law and the prophets, and all those other dispensations which went before, and were purposely designed to lead men

¹ Matt. xiii. 39.

to and by degrees to prepare them for this last and complete revelation of the Divine will. The light of nature, to the Gentiles and all mankind in general, scattered the first seeds of this spiritual fruit; the types and sacrifices of the Mosaic institution were further improvements of the same husbandry: the predictions of the Messiah and his kingdom helped yet more to bring it forward; and the profiting under such ordinances was the growth of the corn. But yet none of these could be called *the harvest*, because men had not under them arrived to their due maturity. That was reserved for the gospel state of perfection, which all the rest were industriously contrived to promote and be subservient to.

When therefore the fulness of time was come, they who gained men over to this state fulfilled the end of all the preceding dispensations. They gathered in the product which those dispensations had made ready for them. Upon which account it is that our blessed Lord himself speaks of the disposition the world was then in to receive the doctrine of his disciples under the figure of *the fields being white to harvest*^m. He calls those who should preach that doctrine *gatherers of fruit unto life eternal*ⁿ. He applies to them, as succeeding the priests and prophets heretofore, that proverb, *One soweth, and another reapeth*; and says upon the same occasion, *I sent you to reap that whereon ye bestowed no labour: other men laboured, and ye are entered into their labours*^o.

These passages, as they give some light, and help us considerably to a right apprehension of this before us, so do they likewise furnish us with a very good reason why our blessed Master should represent the propagation of the Christian faith under the notion of a *harvest*. And that is, the mighty encouragement hereby administered to all who were about to embark in so profitable a design. What St. Paul hints to the Corinthians, our particular sense and experience confirms abundantly to every one of us, that *he that ploweth ploweth in hope, and he that thresheth in hope does it to be partaker of his hope*^p. For as no advantage can be attained without labour, so no labour would be borne, if the prospect of advantage arising from thence did not sustain and quicken men under it. Now though none be more toilsome, yet none, it is plain, is more cheerfully undergone than that of *harvest*. The reason whereof is manifestly this, that it brings its own reward along with it, and puts that very increase into men's present possession which they had long and earnestly expected, and were content to sweat and drudge and be at expense for, in the earliest and most distant seasons, indeed in all the parts of the whole year throughout.

Now this was the case of the apostles and others who undertook to establish Christianity in the world. The attempt was indeed very laborious and difficult. But then their condition was very different from that of prophets and priests in former ages. These planted and sowed, but brought not any fruit to perfection. And this was but an uncomfortable sort of employment, in comparison of theirs, who came in to the reaping part, who found all things ready to their hands, and

^m John iv. 35.ⁿ Ver. 36.^o Ver. 38.^p 1 Cor. ix. 10.

whose business was to give the finishing stroke only. For it was their privilege and particular satisfaction to see and enjoy the success of their own endeavours, by bringing in multitudes of souls, like wheat, into the garner of their Lord, and carrying up religion to as high a pitch of excellence as ever it was designed to reach in the present world.

Thus the gospel, and the preaching of it, being the saving of those souls which the less perfect revelations of God's will had ripened and made fit for this better covenant, the present advantage of the persons concerned, who reaped the benefit of those labourers' pains which had long been preparing the world for that perfection of righteousness which they never lived to see the accomplishment of, is very reasonably styled *a harvest*. For it is the just ripeness of the law of nature and of Moses, and it encouraged the labourers employed to gather it in, by the present and mighty compensation of all their sweat and toil upon this occasion.

By thus long insisting upon the first inquiry we shall find our trouble much shortened in them that follow. For nothing can be plainer, from the analogy of this whole similitude, than that by

2. The labourers, secondly, are meant the ministers of the gospel. The souls of men are *the fruits*; the bringing these over to truth and salvation is *the gathering* of the fruits: and consequently the persons employed and particularly intrusted in this office are *the labourers* mentioned in the text. By *the harvest being great* then are meant the infinite numbers of persons which should be converted to the Christian faith; by *the labourers being few*, the very small number of preachers, at that time exceeding disproportionate to the occasion there was for them; and by *praying the Lord of the harvest that he would send forth labourers*, they were commanded to beg of God so to qualify and appoint men for the undertaking this great work, that so promising and plentiful a crop might not be lost for want of hands to get it in; that they who wanted no inclination might not be destitute of sufficient means; fit and able instructors, whereby they might be *saved*, and *come to the knowledge of the truth*.

3. As little difficulty will there be, thirdly, in discerning who this *Lord of the harvest* is. For that can be no other than Almighty God, who hath declared that *all souls are his*: more particularly the Son of God, and Saviour of the world. For he, besides his original right of creation, hath acquired another title to them, even that of purchase, they being redeemed at the price of his own blood. But is it not amazing that he, who with regard to his Divine nature was the proprietor and Lord of the harvest, should not disdain to take upon him human nature, and in it to perform the office of *a labourer* himself? And yet thus he *went about doing good*, teaching the ignorant, working miracles in confirmation of the truth, persuading, convincing, exhorting, and by all the arts of holy eloquence turning those into good corn who before were weeds and tares in this common field. To his pains and merits and love the very best of men owe their happiness of being brought into the threshingfloor of the church, cleansed and received

into the granary of this spiritual Husbandman. For in themselves they are no better than chaff and refuse, and had deserved to be cast out and burnt with unquenchable fire. Such was his condescension. And for his authority; that he asserted, as by several other instances, so particularly by dispatching the twelve apostles, in the tenth of St. Matthew, and the seventy disciples here, upon this errand of converting men to the truth. For none but *the Lord of the harvest* could of right send forth *labourers*; and he therefore sent them because the harvest was *his*. Which leads us to consider,

4. Fourthly, that, as the labourers whom this Lord sends forth into his harvest must of necessity denote the persons intrusted by him in the business of man's salvation, so the sending them forth manifestly imports his command and commission, by virtue whereof they engage in this great work. Thus the twelve apostles first, and afterwards the seventy, were commissioned by that positive and express authority which Christ gave them from his own mouth. And the power of casting out devils, healing diseases, and doing many other wonderful works, was not only an effectual qualification for persuading those to whom they addressed their discourses; but it was likewise an evident proof of their being sent from God, and delivering such things as were true, and exactly agreeable to his good pleasure. Reason and common sense teach men naturally to argue thus: that God alone can overrule the settled course of causes and effects; that whoever exceeds the fixed rules and powers of nature could do this only by the concurrence of his almighty power; and that it can by no means consist with the infinite justice and goodness of God to lead honest well-meaning men into such dangerous decits, as must be the consequence of believing those doctrines which they submit to, in an humble confidence that the God of truth will not set his seal of miracles to a lie.

But in regard that the calling this gospel-dispensation God's *harvest* implies it to be the last and most perfect dispensation, and consequently to continue till the end of the world; in regard Christ himself hath long ago returned into heaven, there to abide till the final consummation of all things; it is manifest that the ministers and labourers meant here cannot in succeeding ages be supposed to receive their authority from this Lord of the harvest in the same immediate manner as they did who conversed with him in flesh, and were instructed at his own mouth. Again, since the whole harvest is *his*, and none are lawful labourers but those whom he appoints, it must needs be of great importance to know how we may distinguish between the lawful and the usurping labourers; who are intrusted by Christ in the gathering this fruit unto life eternal, and who they are who busily thrust their sickle into another man's corn, and work upon their own beads.

Now when the author to the Hebrews says, (ch. v. 4.) *No man taketh this honour unto himself, but he that is called of God, as was Aaron*; his meaning is, not only that Jesus, as the gospel High Priest, derived his commission from God, as well as the priests under the law; but also that none may presume under this state of things to execute the priest's office without such a commission. For the regular issuing

whereof our Lord himself made provision; when after his resurrection, imparting to the apostles the gift of the Holy Ghost, he says, *As my Father hath sent me, even so send I you*¹. His Father sent him, with power to impart authority for preaching the gospel to his apostles, who after his ascent into heaven were to be the visible directors of the church in his stead. But those apostles were mortal; and therefore he sent them with the same power of imparting their authority to others, who, after their decease, should govern and direct the church in their stead. Thus the power is perpetual and always the same, though the persons exercising and invested with it are frequently changed. Accordingly we find that power used, and directions for the use of it, and what sort of persons ought from time to time to be intrusted with it in the Epistles of the New Testament. And therefore all they whom the successors of those apostles, the bishops and pastors of the Christian church, do examine and approve and appoint to the ministry of the word and sacraments; all those, I say, are *labourers sent by the Lord of the harvest*. And these he sends, when, as the apostle expresses it (Eph. iv.), *he gives some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ*. These several orders and degrees of men, their succession, and their commission, are no less from him than that of his own twelve and seventy sent by himself. The distance of the remove makes no difference in the nature and validity of their call; but all they are sent by him who are sent by those whom he sent with express power to send others. And as such, and such only, are true ministers of the Christian church at large; so those, whom the laws of each particular church and state (agreeably to the laws of the Christian church at large) have determined to some particular places for the exercise of their charge, are to be looked upon as the labourers intrusted with that part of this common field. And all within their several jurisdictions, their several provinces, dioceses, parishes, congregations, are bound, as they will answer to that Lord of the harvest whose labourers these are, to hear and reverence and submit to them as the persons set to *watch over their souls*.

Thus much, I think, may very well suffice for my first head, which undertook to explain the text, and give the true importance of those figurative terms in which it is expressed. I now proceed to my second, which I said should consist of some such observations and inferences arising from thence as may contribute to our improving by it.

1. And first, this spiritual *harvest*, and the greatness of it, gives us a fair occasion to contemplate and admire the power and wisdom and goodness of Almighty God in the astonishing success of his gospel. This is undoubtedly *the Lord's doing*, and such as can never be sufficiently *marvellous in our eyes*. And therefore we, who are, as the apostle calls his Corinthians, *God's husbandry*², ought to reflect upon the mighty operations of his grace in ourselves and others with holy wonder and humble thankfulness. We should constantly stir up our zeal and diligence to answer the good intents of so amazing a providence,

¹ John xx. 21.

² 1 Cor. iii. 9.

and take all possible care to bring forth fruits worthy of such mercy. For dreadful will be our case at last, beyond what we are able to fear or to conceive, if we shall fall under that aggravation of our other sins, to have received this *grace of God in vain*¹.

2. Secondly, when the ministers of the gospel are here called *labourers*, this shews us the nature of our calling. That it is by no means a profession of ease and idleness, but of constant and painful care. When these again are said to be *labourers in harvest*, this is still a greater reproach to them that are slothful; since at such times, and upon that emergency, even the laziest are content to work, or are thought inexcusable if they do not. It likewise intimates to us, with what vigour and alacrity we should perform the several offices required of us; since the labour of harvest is not only hard, but, notwithstanding all the hardship of it, usually attended with a sensible cheerfulness and willing heart above all others. And again, when we are told that this is *the Lord's harvest*, this shews us what end we ought chiefly to propose to ourselves. That neither honour nor reputation, interest nor popularity, must be the things we seek; for this were to forget our Master's and to do our own business. And however any or all those advantages may be the consequence of our fidelity and pains, and such as we may very lawfully desire in their proper place and degree, yet the glory of God, the good of souls, the promotion of virtue and truth, are and ought to be the principal, the constant ends we should aim at. Nor is it any reasonable mortification to our diligence thus not to seek ourselves in what we do, since he who appoints us our task hath engaged to pay us noble wages; and we have ground sufficient always to *abound in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as we know that our labour is not in vain in the Lord*². Who then is a faithful and wise servant, whom his lord hath made ruler over his household, to give them meat in due season? Blessed is that servant, whom his lord when he cometh shall find so doing³.

But, thirdly, as this passage quickens us of the clergy in our duty, so does it contain a great deal which ought to put the people in mind of theirs. And therefore I cannot but desire every one of my readers, in the next place, to look back upon the complaint made at the beginning of the verse; and so to observe the condition of mankind at that time, as carefully to compare it with the church at this day. The *harvest then was great, but the labourers were few*; that is, (as the words have been explained already,) the men of honest dispositions and sincere desires to learn the truth did very much exceed the proportion of those who were qualified to teach them. They wanted not so much the inclination as the means and opportunities of growing better. But now, alas! the case is much otherwise. There is (in this part of the world at least) no scarcity of Christian pastors, no famine of the word, to be complained of. The doctrines of the gospel are constantly and diligently expounded; the motives to a holy life urged with all the skill and care that men, not immediately inspired by God, are capable of; the sacraments frequently and regularly administered in our churches; the necessity and efficacy of these means of grace fully

¹ 2 Cor. vi. 1.² 1 Cor. xv. 58.³ Matt. xxiv. 45, 46.

proved; the invitations to accept and to qualify ourselves for them made in the most affectionate manner that can be; and after all, our Saviour's parable is what we have too just occasion to apply to our respective congregations—*We have piped unto you, and ye have not danced; we have mourned to you, and ye have not wept*¹. We tell men of the glorious privileges and promises of holiness, but these do not make them in love with it. We lay before them the terrors of the Lord, and the dreadful consequences of neglecting their duty and refusing so great salvation; but these persuade them not, nor leave any effectual impression behind. Consider then, I beseech you, how ye will answer the reversing this observation of our blessed Lord. And if the *greatness of the harvest* and the *fewness of the labourers* moved his compassion then, think with yourselves what different affections will be stirred in his breast, and how it must needs provoke the great Judge to anger and vengeance, when *the labourers* are so very *many*, and *the harvest* so scandalously small. *The labourers*, I mean, of his *sending*: for, God knows, there are too many of their own; and the number of these is not a mercy but a punishment. Which puts me in mind of a

4. Fourth thing to be inferred from the text; and that is, the great care men ought to take in distinguishing between the regular and true, and those other busy and pragmatistical labourers, who, without any warrant or command from their Lord, will needs be *thrusting themselves* into his harvest. It was God's complaint by the prophet Jeremy of old, *I have not sent these prophets, yet they ran; I have not spoken to them, yet they prophesied*². The abounding of such teachers, who of their own heads intrude into so weighty a concern, is ever represented in Scripture as a very grievous curse and judgment. And how God comes to suffer this, St. Paul hath given us some account, when he says, *The time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; and they shall turn away their ears from the truth*³. It seems the curiosity of the people, and their not enduring to be told necessary and plain truths, is the beginning of this mischief. A mischief which soon grows to dangerous errors and fatal deceit, and a settled dislike of sound doctrine. For it is scarce to be expected that they who set up themselves should bear the same conscientious regard to what they deliver, with others who are sensible they come by the direction and upon the errand of their Master; and know they must be answerable for the discharge of their duty to that regular and fixed authority by which they were sent. But still, allowing they contain themselves within the bounds of truth; admitting it were true, which for the most part it is not, that their gifts excelled those of our lawful pastors; yet is there still one prejudice against them, which singly ought to weigh down all their boasted and even supposable advantages in other respects; I mean, that these are not *the labourers* sent by our Lord; that is, they have not the same commission derived from him, nor are intrusted with the charge of souls, as lawful pastors are. This is a warning which I could not omit, where there is given so fair

¹ Luke vii. 32.² Jer. xxiii. 21.³ 2 Tim. iv. 3, 4.

an occasion for it. And I do, in the spirit of meekness, and in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, beseech all those very seriously to consider it, who have suffered themselves to conceive any prejudice to their own duly established ministers, and who, upon any specious pretence whatsoever, are prevailed upon to make a breach in the order and unity of the church. And for the rest, I leave this particular upon them, with that exhortation of St. Paul, (Heb. xiii. 17,) *Obeys them that have the rule over you, that is, your spiritual guides, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls as they that must give account; that they may do it with joy, and not with grief; for that is unprofitable for you.*

After what hath been already spoken, there will certainly need but little to enforce that which I design for my last inference, contained in this command of our Saviour, *Pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest that he would send forth labourers into his harvest.* The success of each man's undertakings in his respective profession depends upon the blessing of God for making the means effectual. But the success of ministers is more entirely his. In other cases he needs only not forbid, or at most command, natural effects. But in this, when our persuasion bends corrupt minds to truth and goodness, he produces an effect by instruments in no degree sufficient for it. And therefore, in our daily prayer for *the clergy and the people*, we do most pertinently apply to God as *a God who alone worketh great marvels.* For such indeed it is to turn men's hearts by the ministry of their weak and sinful brethren, who without the continual dew of his grace must needs plant and water in vain. This shews the strong obligation men are under to beg of God that he would prosper the labours of his ministers: which how diligent, how skilful soever, will produce no fruit, except *he give the increase*^b. It shews too of what importance it is to be under the guidance of those whom the Lord of this harvest sends. Because they who labour by his command may more fairly hope for his favourable concurrence than those who presume to run when he never gave them commission. And lastly, we cannot consider the state of Christianity at all without being sensible of the mighty consequence of being furnished with a competent number of teachers, and having those teachers duly qualified for so important a trust.

ST. SIMON AND ST. JUDE'S DAY.

A short Account of St. Simon.

THIS apostle (to distinguish him I suppose from that other Simon, surnamed Peter) is styled *Simon Zelotes*, or *Simon the Canaanite*. The latter of which does by no means seem to refer to his country or kindred, but is indeed the same in sense with *Zelotes*, and derived from an Hebrew as that from a Greek word signifying *zeal*^a. Whether this title was given him in regard of any personal warmth and vigour remarkable in him, or whether to denote that he was one of

^b 1 Cor. iii. 5, 6.

^a Matt. x. 4; Mark iii. 18; Luke vi. 15; Acts i. 13.

that sect called *Zealots* among the Jews, we know not. If upon the latter account, his conversion is the more remarkable. For nothing could be more opposite to the meekness and gentleness of Christianity than the irregularity and fierceness of that spirit by which this sect were actuated. A dismal account whereof Josephus has given in his books of the Jewish war ^b.

That this Simon is the person reckoned amongst our Lord's brethren, there seems little reason to doubt ^c. Except we will allow the account in St. Jerome's catalogue to be a good one, where all circumstances plainly shew that the saint of this day is mistaken for and confounded with Simeon the second bishop of Jerusalem. We have no particulars concerning him in the New Testament, save only his call to the apostleship, and that other passage referred to just now. Upon the dispersion of the apostles he is said to have preached in Egypt, Cyrene, Africa, Mauritania, and the barbarous parts of Libya ^d. To which some add Mesopotamia; and say, that meeting there with St. Jude they went together into Persia, and there both received the crown of martyrdom. This tradition might possibly be the cause why the church commemorates both together in one festival ^e. Though others are equally positive in a very different report ^f; telling us, that he preached the gospel in Britain, and, after many miracles wrought, and great hardships endured, was at last put to death, for the testimony of the truth, by the then rude and barbarous inhabitants of this island.

A short Account of St. Jude.

This person is also reckoned with St. Simon amongst our Lord's brethren, and that he was certainly of that number we have undeniable testimonies ^g: for his own Epistle styles him *the brother of James* ^h, and that James is by St. Paul styled *the brother of our Lord* ⁱ.

He is also called by the evangelists *Thaddæus* and *Lebbæus*; names which might probably belong to him for distinction's sake from Judas Iscariot. The former of them is supposed to have been chosen for the affinity of its signification to the name of Judas, for both signify *praise*. But the Jews, superstitiously abstaining from the sacred name of Jehovah, extended that superstition to several other words composed of the same letters. Of which this *Jehuda* (for so it is at length) being one, they might probably, as they did in many like cases, change it in common speech for another of like importance, but different characters.

Concerning the other name, of Lebbæus, conjectures have been various. Some, deriving it from a Hebrew word, which signifies *a heart*, will have it to intimate the extraordinary wisdom and courage of this apostle. Others draw it from a root which imports *a lion*, and think it an allusion to that prophecy of Jacob which compares his son Judah to an old lion and a lion's whelp. And a learned critic of our

^b Lib. iv. cap. 5, 6. lib. v. cap. 2, 3, 9. ^c Matt. xiii. 55; Mark vi. 3. ^d Chrys. in 12 Ap. Hieron. in Gal. c. 4. ^e Brev. Rom. ^f Menolog. Græc. ad x. diem Maii. ^g Matt. xiii. 55; Mark vi. 3. ^h Verse 1. ⁱ Gal. i. 19.

own age^k is of opinion that this name was taken from *Labbā*, a town in Galilee, where he supposes this apostle to have been born.

After his call to attend upon our Lord as one of the twelve, we find nothing particular concerning him, except in one passage of St. John's Gospel^l. There, interrupting our Lord's discourse concerning his and his Father's presence with his servants and disciples, he gives occasion for a fuller explication of those peculiar favours and influences of the divine Spirit which the faithful should not fail of enjoying to their infinite comfort, at the same time that the rest of the world remained incapable of them.

After our Lord's ascent into heaven St. Jude preached for some time about Judæa and Galilee, then in Samaria, Idumæa, Syria, and Mesopotamia. I mention not Edessa, because, to say the least, it is very doubtful whether this was the same Thaddæus mentioned in the first book of Eusebius's History^m. And indeed that author speaks of his Thaddæus under no higher a quality than one of the seventy disciples. He is thought at last to have travelled into Persia; and at the instigation of the Magi there, whom he had provoked with open rebukes for their idolatrous worship of the sun, and several other idle superstitions, to have been assaulted by the common people, and, after other previous cruelties, crucified.

Eusebius mentions some of his grandchildren brought before Domitianⁿ. Wickedness had perplexed that tyrant, as it generally does great oppressors, with unreasonable jealousies and fears. He no doubt had heard of Christ's kingdom; and, according to the then vulgar error, expected the greatness of it shortly to appear in the conquest and dissolution of all other kingdoms. Understanding therefore that some of the lineage of David and relations of Jesus yet remained, he sent for these descendants of St. Jude, and examined nicely into their family, their condition, and their doctrine upon this point. Their answer to this emperor was like that of Jesus to Pilate, that his kingdom is not of this world. The mean figure they made contributed greatly to the credit of their reply; insomuch that, being thought free from any design which might prejudice the empire, and incapable of effecting mischief, supposing them to design any, they were dismissed, as below a prince's anger; and afterwards lived many years in great authority in the Christian church.

The only work St. Jude left behind him is that Epistle which bears his name. The authority whereof, though it was for some time doubted, has yet been long, and upon good grounds, acknowledged for his. The arguments commonly alleged on the contrary side being indeed such as will equally lie against other parts of the New Testament, which have always, without any scruple, been received as canonical. The design of it seems to be, to expose in their true light the corrupt principles and practices of those heretics commonly called Gnostics. There is a great resemblance between this and the Second Epistle of St. Peter. The end aimed at in both is evidently the same. The arguments and expressions in many cases are so much alike, that it has been disputed whether St. Jude hath here abridged that of

^k Lightfoot.

^l Ch. xiv. 22, &c.

^m Ch. 12.

ⁿ Lib. iii. cap. 20.

St. Peter, or St. Peter enlarged upon this of St. Jude. But most are of the former opinion.

THE COLLECT.

O ALMIGHTY GOD, who hast built thy Church upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the head corner-stone^o; Grant us so to be joined together in unity of spirit by their doctrine, that we may be made an holy temple acceptable unto thee; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

THE EPISTLE. St. Jude.

1 *Jude, the servant of Jesus Christ, and brother of James, to them that are sanctified by God the Father, and preserved in Jesus Christ, and called:*

2 *Mercy unto you, and peace, and love, be multiplied.*

3 *Beloved, when I gave all diligence to write unto you of the common salvation, it was needful for me to write unto you, and exhort you that ye should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints.*

doctrines delivered to the church, as the standard of that belief which is necessary to salvation.

4 *For there are certain men crept in unawares, who were before of old ordained to this condemnation, ungodly men, turning the grace of our God into lasciviousness, and denying the only Lord God, and our Lord Jesus Christ.*

prophecies before them, foretold the crime and sort of men.

5 *I will therefore put you in remembrance, though ye once knew this, how that the Lord, having saved the people out of the land of Egypt, afterward destroyed them that believed not.*

those Israelites of the church too who perished for their disobedience in the wilderness, even after partaking in the mercy of the deliverance out of bondage in Egypt.

6 *And the angels which kept not their first estate, but left their own habitation, he hath reserved in everlasting chains under darkness unto the judgment of the great day.*

3. The present circumstances of Christianity are such as make it my duty to excite your zeal to a firm persuasion and vigorous asserting of the orthodox doctrines

4. Which though some have laboured to pervert and corrupt, yet ought not this greatly to surprise you, because not only Christ and his apostles, but other prophets and the punishment of this

5. Whose wicked snares those who go in to will find no benefit by professing themselves members of the church of God; for so were

6. Nay, the very angels themselves escaped not, when shewing themselves unworthy of their dignity and bliss in heaven.

7 *Even as Sodom and Gomorrha, and the cities about them in like manner, giving themselves over to fornication, and going after strange flesh, are set forth for an example, suffering the vengeance of eternal fire.*

7. An emblem of whose everlasting punishment we have in the irreparable destruction of Sodom and Gomorrha.

8 *Likewise also these filthy dreamers defile the flesh, despise dominion, and speak evil of dignities.*

8. Whose vices these heretics imitate, in their beastly carnalities; and patronise their filthiness by false and horrid doctrines concerning the angels, and by contempt of their superiors.

COMMENT.

THE corruptions against which the apostle here inveighs are such as all history of the primitive church charges upon the Gnostics. Concerning whom my reader had some account upon the Epistle for St. John the Evangelist's day.

The first argument he makes use of, for the creating a just detestation of these seducers and their principles, is, that they are the pernicious people of whom long and frequent warning had been given. Accordingly, to them he applies a prediction as old as Enoch, ver. 14. And of the same those many descriptions of *the last days* have been by most interpreters understood, which we find given by our Lord himself, Matt. xxiv, and by St. Paul, 1 Tim. iv, 2 Tim. iii, as also by St. Peter throughout his Second Epistle. And in this sense it is that some ancient and very good expositors understand that they were said here to be *προεγγραμμένοι*. A sense manifestly true, and less liable to exception than that very harsh one which applies the word to an absolute decree, by which both the crime and the punishment of those men was predetermined inevitably by Almighty God.

2. His next argument is taken from the wickedness of the tenets and practices of these heretics; the inconsistency of both with the gospel of Christ, and the infamy from thence derived upon it: while they had still the confidence to profess a religion to which both their conversation and their doctrine was a downright contradiction. This will be plain to any who reflect upon the carnalities of those impure Nicolaitans who cursed the confinements of marriage as a contrivance of the devil, and pleaded for community of women as a privilege which ought not to be refused to our species, since nature had indulged other creatures in promiscuous mixtures. These and such like unclean doctrines were taken into the Gnostic scheme: doctrines so far from comporting with the chastity of the gospel, that the irreconcilable opposition between them is emphatically represented by *light* and *darkness*. And therefore, had there been no other, as indeed there were many, this alone had been reason sufficient for styling the authors and abettors of such sensualities *ungodly men, turning the grace of God into lasciviousness*; and even thus (as well as by Simon Magus declaring himself *God the Father* to the Samaritans and *God the Son* to the Jews) *denying the only Lord God, and our Lord Jesus Christ*.

3. A third argument is the certainty of their punishment; notwithstanding any exemptions they might flatter themselves with on account of their retaining to the church and people of God. This vanity he exposes by instances of judgments heretofore overtaking persons protected by the same or greater privileges. For the former whereof, relating to the Israelites, I refer my reader to the Epistle for the ninth Sunday after Trinity; and for the latter, to that on Michaelmas day.

THE GOSPEL. John xv. 17.

17 *These things I command you, that ye love one another.*

18 *If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you.* the truth, that I have been already treated after the same manner, and upon the same account.

19 *If ye were of the world, the world would love his own: but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you.*

20 *Remember the word that I said unto you, The servant is not greater than his lord. If they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you; if they have kept my saying, they will keep your's also.*

21 *But all these things will they do unto you for my name's sake, because they know not him that sent me.*

22 *If I had not come and spoken unto them, they had not had sin: but now they have no cloke for their sin.*

23 *He that hateth me hateth my Father also.*

24 *If I had not done among them the works which none other man did, they had not had sin: but now have they both seen and hated both me and my Father.*

God. For the despite done to me, who have been authorized, and thus eminently attested to by God, does not terminate in my person, but is done to God himself.

25 *But this cometh to pass, that the word might be fulfilled that is written in their law, They hated me without a cause.*

so signally fulfilled as upon
26 *But when the Comforter is come, whom I will send unto you from the Father, even the Spirit of truth, which proceedeth from the Father, he shall testify of me:*

18. Let this encourage you in your sufferings for

19, 20. See the Comment.

21—24. This behaviour is the effect of their not attending to the commission I come with, nor the evidences of it; which have been far superior to any ever given before of any teacher coming from God. So that their infidelity does not proceed from ignorance, but affected blindness and obstinacy, and malice against

25. Meanwhile that prophetic complaint of David (Psalm lxxix. 11.) never was this occasion, *They hated &c.*

26, 27. See Gospel for the Sunday after Ascension.

27 *And ye also shall bear witness, because ye have been with me from the beginning.*

COMMENT.

THE immediate design of our Lord in this scripture is, to leave such impressions on the minds of his disciples as might preserve their faith and buoy up their hearts in the midst of those distresses and persecutions which they were shortly to encounter, in execution of the trust reposed in them for propagating and establishing his blessed gospel. His arguments to this purpose are chiefly two. First, that they suffered after their Lord's example; and secondly, that the cause in which they were engaged was such as might reasonably support them under any hardships upon that account. The former of these I shall so consider as to include all sorts of affliction incident to good men; the latter, so as may abate our surprise, and arm us with patience, when the endeavours of holy persons to promote the honour of God and religion do at any time provoke opposition and despite.

Now first, how high soever matters may be carried against us, or how hard soever they may bear upon us, it could not but be then to these disciples, it must in reason be to every good man, a mighty consolation, that the same malice and scorn, the same difficulties and sufferings, fell upon the Son of God; and that in this respect also the great Author and Captain of our salvation did not disdain to become our leader and pattern. The stress fit to be laid upon this argument may easily be collected from the frequent occasions taken to inculcate it. It is true that the applications generally made of it do regard the reproach and contempt, the persecutions and pains, sustained upon accounts purely religious, and especially by the first planters of the Christian faith. But in regard the Son of God condescended to other griefs, both of nature and of fortune; in regard that these also are by the wise ordering of God; as no followers of this Master ought to think it strange if they find no better regard from men than he did; so it is much more manifest they have no reason to repine at Providence, when called to suffer in any other kind what he hath felt and submitted to before them. For what is the best and greatest of the sons of men in comparison of this eternal Son of God? It is confessed no injury was done to the dignity and innocence of this divine person, because he freely consented to this humiliation. But then this ought to reconcile us to those severer dispensations, when God himself thought it no diminution to the perfections of his nature to become *a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief*. It could not have consisted with those perfections to consent to any thing unworthy of God; and what it did not misbecome him to choose cannot possibly be beneath us to accept. Shall we grumble at poverty, when the Lord of the whole earth *had not where to lay his head*, and was sustained by the zealous ministry of others? Shall we be enraged and impatient for affronts and disgrace, when the majesty of the Holy One was traduced and blasphemed, buffeted and spit upon, scourged and crucified?

Shall we grumble at sickness and pain, when we remember his agonies and tortures? or accuse God for hiding from us the cheering light of his countenance, and the comfortable sense of his favour and love, when we read of his soul heavy and sorrowful, *even unto death*; of his amazements and inward confusions, and such a suspension of the Divine presence, as, added to the extremities of a most bitter bodily torment, forced from him a complaint of God's having forsaken him? What do the most destitute, most miserable of men endure, that can be named with his unspeakable griefs? What are the mightiest, the holiest of them, if put into the balance with him? Far be it then from us to think that measure hard which hath been meted to the holy Jesus! far from us to receive with murmuring and indignation what he hath condescended to! far to suppose that God should be unjust, in making us happy by the selfsame methods which exalted the human nature of his Son to the throne on high! far from us especially, when we consider that all he underwent was the effect of love and free choice, but that our afflictions are the effect of necessity, and such as we are wisely and justly destined to!

Let us next consider the cause which engaged these disciples, and proportionably all zealous promoters of the honour of God and religion. And this will minister one mighty support, by representing the ground of the world's hatred to be common to Christ and his disciples. So that they who treated the one ill cannot, if they will act consistently with themselves, deal friendly or respectfully by the other. This subject hath indeed been touched upon before, but, upon offering itself again, I will now enter into it a little more particularly.

It was formerly observed, how vain it is to expect that any scheme of religion, or the author and professors of such a scheme, should recommend themselves to the world, or be much in its good graces, who do not only not suit with the dispositions and practices most in vogue, but take upon them to rebuke, and, if it be possible, to destroy, these, and bring in the direct contrary in their stead. Now how this was the case of Christ and his apostles, and is so in some degree of the preachers and conscientious professors of the gospel ever since, though it be plain enough, one would think, of itself, yet it may not be amiss a little to explain.

The appearance of Christ in the flesh, his birth and manner of living, were very mean and ordinary, and this begat in the Jews a great aversion to him; as did afterwards the scandalous circumstances of the death he vouchsafed to die, in Jews and Gentiles both.

But besides the disappointed expectation of a Messiah glorious and triumphant over the temporal enemies of the Jewish state, the very temper and design of Christ's doctrines in general is such as contradicts the common disposition of mankind. And this is a reason why it always had, and always will have, a numerous party against it; not only in the seasons of persecution, but in those of peace and public tranquillity; not among professed infidels alone, but pretending believers and admirers of it.

The constitution of mankind, as now corrupted by sin and concupiscence, disposes them to pride, and a mighty conceit of their own abilities.

It blows them up with fond opinions of knowledge; and when, by comparing themselves with creatures of an inferior condition, they find that reason is the peculiar talent with which the great Lord of all things hath enriched human nature, they grow big with their privilege, and are loath to allow that any bounds should be set to it. Now the doctrine of our Saviour, though in the practical part it carry the most perfect agreement to the best reason; and there is not any one precept in the whole scheme of it which may not very fairly be accounted for; yet it proposes withal several articles to be received which are full of mystery, and by no means of a size with finite understandings. Hence arises the virtue mentioned by St. Paul, of *bringing every thought into captivity*, and paying that which is upon this account most emphatically styled *the obedience of faith*; that is, to rest upon the truth and revelation of God, and silently to adore what we cannot comprehend. Now this hath all along given people a prejudice to the Christian religion, and provoked them either to deny and oppose and ridicule it, or, which is but little better, to mangle and pare it away, till they have brought it down to the model of their own comprehensions. All which is the effect of an inborn absurd vanity, that knows nothing above one's self in wisdom, and will not allow God himself to say or do any thing which wretched ignorant man cannot conceive and explain.

Very near of kin to this sort of pride is that other, by which we are led into false notions of our virtues and performances, and swelled with imaginations of our own worth. And thence arises another aversion against Christ and his religion; in regard it obliges men to disdain all merit of their own, breaks all the false glasses which nature or industry had held to them, and shews them to themselves without a magnifier, the very same impotent, frail, sinful creatures that really they are. It lays their mouths in the dust, and declares all flesh guilty before God; so that no acceptance, no salvation is to be expected for any righteousness of theirs: a righteousness interrupted and blemished with a mixture of many bad actions; a righteousness short and imperfect in its very best actions; and therefore standing in need of an unspotted innocence, a complete obedience, a sufficient propitiation to be justified and saved by, to atone for miscarriages, to fill up what is wanting through weakness, and to recommend the imperfect when they are honest endeavours. This was the choking principle to the Jews; as rendering their law unable to effect what they promised themselves from it. And it is so to all men: for almost all do so far Judaize as to depend upon carnal confidences; and rather trust to the sandy bottom of their own worth and supposed sufficiency, than renounce that wicked partiality of admiring and trusting in themselves. So hard a submission is it in good earnest to confess they are objects of mercy, and to cast their whole hopes of comfort and safety upon the sufferings and services of a crucified Redeemer.

Again, the condition of our nature hath made us subject to different sorts of desires and inclinations. For by consisting of a body as well as a soul, we are necessarily wrought upon by the motions of

both. This was no inconvenience in our original make : because then each part knew and kept its distance, and the sensual submitted to the dictates and directions of the reasonable soul. But since that order hath been confounded by the fall and corruption of man, nothing but rebellion and discord and perpetual struggles have ensued. The passions gather and get head, and oftentimes hurry us away, not only beyond, but even contrary to reason. They propose to us objects which consideration cannot like, and betray us into extravagancies which our cooler and soberer sense is heartily ashamed of. Now the design of Christianity is to reduce these rebels, to deliver our minds from usurpation and tyranny, and settle the rightful sovereign, reason, in the throne again : it shews us the folly of enslaving ourselves to violent appetites, and teaches us to proceed upon the measures of good and evil, and to make our choices according to the real proportion of that good and that evil. To this, one would think, men should easily be brought : but here lies the difficulty, that the gospel propounds the happiness we ought to seek as a very distant thing, and turns us over to a long day, a future and invisible state, for the attainment of it. And yet at the same time it expects so steadfast affiance in God's word, and so fixed a resolution in our duty, that if we are called to suffering, no hardship must be thought too great to undergo for his sake ; and if the whole world were to be had in exchange for our souls, that is, with the commission of a wilful deliberate sin, which will expose our souls to damnation and the wrath of God, we are taught to refuse those terms, as being not only an unlawful but an imprudent bargain. Now these things are such as require a very exalted virtue to comply with them : and though a man, when he sits down coolly, may be able to convince himself that they demand nothing of us but what is highly reasonable, yet it requires more than bare speculation to behave one's self accordingly in a present strait. Our Saviour compares those to corn in stony ground who received the word with joy, and in time of temptation fall away. That is, agreeably to his own interpretation of the parable, who had considered and understood the doctrines he taught, were highly satisfied in the fitness of what God expected from them, but yet, when any uncommon trial happened to make an assault, the same consideration did not serve them in the time of greatest exigency. Some alluring prospect of pleasure or profit blinded their eyes ; some horrid appearance of danger frightened away all their presence of mind ; and so sense prevailed against reason, and either justled it quite aside, or else bore it down in the conflict. This is the condition of such as we are content to think good men for the main : but as for them who have given themselves up to work all manner of uncleanness with greediness, they have set up their rest in present enjoyments, and entertain all exhortations to a sober and severe virtue, all threatenings and promises that concern a future state, with drollery and scorn. And if a system of goodness and sobriety, of meekness and mortification, do not suit the relish of an intemperate and revengeful and narrow-spirited man, we are not to wonder. The reformation of manners, and introducing a pure and spiritual worship in the room of those abominable rites and

beastly mysteries of heathen idols, made the gospel so hard of digestion to the Gentiles. The requiring substantial holiness of heart and life, and throwing off the Levitical dispensation, which consisted in ceremony, and cheated men with a false hope in external sanctifications, made it offensive to the Jews. And all the loose and dissolute part of the world have the same quarrel to it still. Our Lord was instant and bold in reproving the Jews, and shewing them their faults; his ministers are commanded to *cry aloud, and shew the people their transgressions*, to set before them what they do not care to see, and press them perpetually to that which they do not like to practise. This made him so spitefully used; and the same invidious and unwelcome office will not fail to entail the same coldness and disrespect and despite upon us. And since those who are not sent with special commissions, but only discharge the duty of private Christians well, do yet by their good works reproach and expose the bad ones of ill men, who *hold the truth in unrighteousness*, they also must expect to come in for a share in the same angry resentments. Could there any possible way be found out to accommodate precepts to inclinations, such an expedient would have reconciled the world to Christianity. But when it was declared that there is an absolute necessity of denying ungodliness; of abandoning this, or giving over all thoughts of heaven and hopes of happiness; the only method left for people wedded to worldly and carnal lusts was, and we see daily is, taken up: and that is, when truth cannot be for them, nor religion bend to their liberties and vitiated palates, to take distaste at truth, and, by way of revenge, resolve that they will no longer be for religion.

The persons and the principles then of Christ and his disciples are hated and discountenanced; but it is because they give the first provocation; because they are too divine, too good for polluted wretches; and they who have not the grace to be reformed by them think it for their interest to run them down. This is a refuge to cover the deformity of their own vices, and keep sin in countenance, by proclaiming war against that which can never be at peace with it. Justice and charity to the poor are grievous, but it is to the covetous and ill-natured, that they are so. Humility and meekness and poverty of spirit are derided and ridiculed; but they are the insolent and the proud that endeavour to expose them. Forgiveness of injuries and putting up of affronts are rallied; but the reason is, because they tie up men's hands from cruelty and revenge. Suffering for righteousness' sake is traduced as a most unnatural duty and extravagant hardness; but it is by those who are sunk into flesh and sense, and have either no belief, or but very poor and weak notions, of the kingdom and crown hereafter; and that eternal weight of glory to which such gallant fidelity entitles us. Thus the case plainly stands in all the other instances. For even the severest of these virtues justify themselves to impartial and good men. Every one is content to allow the reasonableness of religion abstractedly considered; or so far as it suits his own complexion or humour, his satisfaction or his interest. But when once it comes to grate close, when it crosses his appetites, and goes against the grain; when it robs him of any delightful en-

joyment already in possession, or checks him in the pursuit of any in view; then he shakes hands, and can be no longer friends with it. The frugal and covetous man sees the fitness of temperance and industry, and all those commands that forbid luxury and riot, and every vain and immoderate expense. The profuse and sensual discern and detest the deformity of avarice. Thus every part of religion approves itself to the judgment of the disinterested and unprejudiced. But let us turn the tables, and apply the rules to each man's own vice: tell the voluptuous, that if he will be Christ's he must crucify his affections and lusts; and the miser, that the matter can never be compounded between God and mammon; and then, oh! these are hard sayings, who can hear them? The man of pleasures, and the man of possessions, will then go away sorrowful, like the rich youth in the Gospel; and think it a hard bargain to sell his lands or his delights, though never so much assured that he shall purchase heaven in exchange.

So evident is it that the world hates goodness and good men, because itself is wicked. The general acknowledgment of mathematical truths hath very reasonably been thought to proceed, not entirely from the clear and demonstrable certainty of them, but in some degree from hence, that men can have no interest in opposing them. It signifies nothing to any man's pleasure or his profit, whether the right angle of a triangle be equal to the other two; no one desire is curbed or gratified, no advantage, no sensual enjoyment promoted or dobarred one whit by its being thus or otherwise. But in all moral truths we ourselves are parties as well as judges, and have some end or other to serve in pronouncing of them. Our affections, like a corrupt jury, are bribed beforehand, and not at liberty to receive the evidence as it is. So that in order to doing justice here, much temper and a sincere candid sentence is needful; and this cannot be had but from persons of integrity and unblamable lives. Such men can approve what condemns wickedness, because they have no bias upon their minds, and are under no fear of being reproached by their own consciences. But a profligate liver knows that he condemns himself at the same time; and so is forced to reject openly, or at least must seem to disallow, religion in his own defence. And it is a very fatal as well as a very common consequence of sin, to propagate itself from the affections to the judgment; to drive men from consideration, and either incline them not to think at all, or at least to hinder them from thinking true. For passion and guilt will darken the glass quite, or else so confound the distances and colours that no objects shall appear there as they really are.

So then, if virtue and vice were to stand and fall by the poll, Christianity might be in some danger. But since it is not the majority so much as the quality of voices that wise men value, there can be no possible good reason why the common hatred or contempt of religion should make us one jot the less in love with it. For the votes of those against it are of no moment in the world. They are the clamours of fools, the ravings of madmen, or the perverse oppositions of a faction; men whose dishonesty and whose interest

ought in all equity to be excepted against; and therefore these are in effect but so many ciphers, ten thousand of which, when alone, make no number. And sure that man's principles and resolution are very weak who will suffer himself to be carried away by the torrent of a senseless or a prejudiced multitude; who will be jested out of the practice of godliness, which hath no enemies that are worthy to be its friends, but if it were less lovely would not fail to be more generally beloved.

ALL SAINTS' DAY.

THE COLLECT.

O ALMIGHTY GOD, who hast knit together thine elect in one communion and fellowship, in the mystical body of thy Son Christ our Lord; Grant us grace so to follow thy blessed Saints in all virtuous and godly living, that we may come to those unspeakable joys, which thou hast prepared for them that unfeignedly love thee; through Jesus Christ our Lord Amen^a.

THE EPISTLE. Rev. vii. 2.

2 *And I saw another angel ascending from the east, having the seal of the living God: and he cried with a loud voice to the four angels, to whom it was given to hurt the earth and the sea,* 2. After the intended judgments upon idolaters and infidels, represented ver. 1, God was pleased to signify his resolution to save from the common calamity those faithful servants who had been careful to save themselves pure from the common corruption.

3 *Saying, Hurt not the earth, neither the sea, nor the trees, till we have sealed the servants of our God in their foreheads.* 3. And this signification was made by the form of an angel, (Christ himself, as some, or, as others, one of those good spirits commissioned and sent by him,) declaring this merciful decree of God; and commanding the other spirits, about to inflict the judgments, to suspend the execution of them, till a discriminating mark was set on those whose fidelity had moved God to except them out of the power of hurting, allowed to take place on all not so distinguished.

4 *And I heard the number of them which were sealed: and there were sealed an hundred and forty and four thousand of all the tribes of the children of Israel.* 4. The converted Jews, who partook of the mercy, were represented to me as sealed, a certain number of every tribe.

5 *Of the tribe of Juda were sealed twelve thousand. Of the tribe of Reuben* 5. (See the Comment.)

were sealed twelve thousand. Of the tribe of Gad were sealed twelve thousand.

6 Of the tribe of Aser were sealed twelve thousand. Of the tribe of Nephthalim were sealed twelve thousand. Of the tribe of Manassas were sealed twelve thousand.

7 Of the tribe of Simeon were sealed twelve thousand. Of the tribe of Levi were sealed twelve thousand. Of the tribe of Issachar were sealed twelve thousand.

8 Of the tribe of Zabulon were sealed twelve thousand. Of the tribe of Joseph were sealed twelve thousand. Of the tribe of Benjamin were sealed twelve thousand.

9 After this I beheld, and, lo, a great multitude, which no man could number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues, stood before the thrones, and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, and palms in their hands;

10 And cried with a loud voice, saying, Salvation to our God which sitteth upon the thrones, and unto the Lamb. Unanimously praising his mercy for their deliverance out of and conquest over their trials.

11 And all the angels stood round about the throne, and about the elders and the four beasts, and fell before the thrones on their faces, and worshipped God,

12 Saying, Amen: Blessing, and glory, and wisdom, and thanksgiving, and honour, and power, and might, be unto our God for ever and ever. Amen.

voices testifying their unity with the church on earth; and teaching us what order and agreement there ought to be in all the members that compose this body.

9, 10. Then appeared to me Gentile converts in vast numbers; representing the church catholic all the world over, with marks of innocence and victorious constancy, and these were in the presence of God and Christ, worshipping, and un-

11, 12. In which acts of devotion and thanksgiving the heavenly powers, and all the church triumphant, did likewise seem to join, repeating and confirming the same land and adoration.

By those united hearts and

COMMENT.

I do not propose upon this occasion to detain my reader with the disputes set on foot by interpreters of this Book, concerning those events and that state of the Christian church to which the passage before us is severally applied. Let them who have learning and leisure sufficient amuse themselves with those matters. My business, whose end is godly edifying, shall be only to explain some few things relating to the manner and expression, and afterwards to make use of the substance, of this vision; as they who have recommended it seem to have thought most profitable, and most apposite to the design of this festival.

1. The vision of an angel, to mark the servants of God, is agreeable to what we read in other places of Scripture to have been done in

favour and for a distinction to them whom God saw fit to rescue out of some great and general calamity. Thus we find the blood of the passover commanded to be put upon the Israelitish houses^b, as a token for the angel which destroyed the firstborn of the Egyptians to forbear any execution where this preservative appeared. Thus in Ezekiel's vision^c, the six slayers, ordered to pass through the city, were strictly enjoined to hold their hand, till one, sent forth for that purpose, had first *set a mark of exemption on the foreheads of them that sighed and cried for all the abominations done in the midst thereof*^d. And in like manner here, *the angel who had the four winds in his hand is not allowed to hurt the earth, nor the sea, nor the trees, till those servants of God were sealed in their foreheads*^e, whom he had determined to save from this destruction.

It may well be doubted what particular judgment those metaphorical terms, of *hurting the earth, and the sea, and the trees*, imported. Whether, as some have thought, the vengeance upon Jerusalem and Judea; or, as others, the barbarous havoc made at the dissolution of the Roman empire; or, as a third sort, the cruelties exercised nearer our own times upon them who refused to comply with the idolatries and corruptions of Antichrist. But still all acknowledge some dismal calamity to be meant, from which these *sealed* were to escape: and that the use and end of *sealing* them was to make this mark a defence against that ruin in which the greater numbers, not so signed, should be miserably swallowed up.

2. A like allusion to former dispensations we may also observe in the numbering of these *sealed*. The correspondence between *Israel after the flesh* and *Israel after the spirit*, between the church of God under the law and under the gospel, hath frequently fallen in the way of our notice before. And from thence the reasonableness of those modes of speech is very obvious which apply such terms to the latter, as in their primary and literal sense are peculiar to the former. As well therefore upon this account, of the people of God being heretofore divided into tribes, as because the Christian state, which succeeded upon the Jewish, was for some time composed of members proselyted from that religion, the servants of God *sealed* under the gospel are distributed here into tribes.

3. Concerning the order in which we find them placed, the conjectures of expositors are neither so clear as to be depended on, nor of moment so great as to deserve any particular disquisition. Thus much however may be worth our mention. That Judah is very probably set in the front, not only because the post of honour was assigned to that tribe in the encampments and motions of the whole body of Israel heretofore, but which indeed (considering the typical state of the people heretofore) might be the reason of the preference then given it by God, because such prerogative was due to that tribe, of which Christ, the King and universal Lord of God's true people, condescended to be born.

4. It is further observable, that the order of the tribes throughout is different in this from that usual in other places. For they are

^b Exod. xii.^c Chap. ix.^d Ver. 4.^e Ver. 1, 2.

sometimes named according to the age of the patriarchs from whom they sprung; sometimes, according to the dignity of the mothers that bore those patriarchs; sometimes, according to the situation of their respective settlements in the Holy Land.

Now whatever were the reason of taking another method here, this reflection at least it ministers just ground for: That under the Christian dispensation there is no respect of persons, no deference paid to wealth, or to nobility of descent, or to priority of birth, or to any of those other considerations which set one man above another in the regards of this world. But all who are truly in Christ, be they otherwise *bond or free, high or low, rich or poor*, have equal concern in the distribution of spiritual advantages. And as each shall be careful to distinguish himself by virtue and obedience, he shall not fail to receive proportionably distinguishing marks of the Divine grace and bounty.

5. Again, in this catalogue the tribe usually called Ephraim hath the name of Joseph. That of Dan is wholly passed over, and the number is made complete by taking in Levi. The first might probably be done to leave a note of infamy upon a name known for many ages to have been set up in opposition to Judah, and made the common title of rebels and schismatics; revolters from the government as settled in the line of David, and separatists from the established church at Jerusalem. A name upon so many accounts grown scandalous may well be exchanged, in a catalogue of Christian confessors, for one which, by the mention of Ephraim's ancestor, naturally brings to mind that innocence and constancy in suffering, and that reward and exaltation consequent to it, wherein the patience and preservation of the *sealed* bore so eminent a resemblance to the virtues and fortunes of Joseph.

Again, in regard the persecutions sustained by these good men were provoked by their inflexible adherence to the one true God, and the purity of his worship; the tribe of Dan, which first apostatized to idolatry, and from the time of Jeroboam received the calves, by which that corruption had been all along continued, was altogether unworthy to be mentioned here as a type of pure and unblemished Christians. Into his place therefore Levi is fitly taken; who, though frequently omitted in the Old Testament, because having no inheritance in the partition of the earthly Canaan, was yet, of all others, most proper to represent those heavenly-minded saints who chose to make the Lord their only *portion* by *forsaking all* and *following him*.

6. Once more. From the number of these *sealed* we are by no means warranted to conclude that so many, or that no more, were saved out of each tribe of Israel. But as the manner of reckoning by tribes was shewn to be allusive, so is the number of the *sealed* in each allusive too: and as that had a retrospect to the old, this bears a particular regard to the ministers of the new dispensation. The conversions wrought among their own countrymen might well be represented by many thousands in every tribe; for this was but justice to the wonderful success of their indefatigable labours. And those thousands are most fitly multiplied by twelve, because this was an

honour due to the college of the apostles, the principal labourers in this spiritual harvest, and the fathers who begat so glorious a progeny in Christ.

Thus we have another instance of the analogy, frequent in these mystical writings, between the legal and evangelical people of God, such as we find expressed in the *walls* and foundations and angels and gates and dimensions of the new Jerusalem^f: all these agree in the numbers here made use of; and are abundantly explained by those very significant words, that in the *twelve foundations* of that city-wall were inscribed *the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb*. The number of which noble fraternity multiplied by itself produces that sum of Jewish converts here, who, by adhering steadfastly to their doctrine and fellowship, approved themselves the genuine offspring of the apostles.

7. The same method, we observe, is not taken at the seventh verse, because there was no like analogy to justify or ground it upon. For the multitude there meant are most probably the Gentile converts. A multitude *which no man could number* indeed: so amazingly present and powerful was the grace of God with them. A race of aliens; whose zeal outran the children of the family: who, from the vilest dregs of superstition and idolatry, commenced a church of purity and constancy, of unrepurchased conduct and unalienable affection to that heavenly Spouse who disdained not so mean a marriage, even Jesus Christ. For as the greatness of their trials proved their fidelity, so the success of that fidelity is intimated by their *palms* and *white robes*. And the reward of their victorious innocence is particularly set forth from ver. 13. to the end of this chapter.

8. Interpreters have differed in their opinions concerning the seal said here to be set on the foreheads of the *hundred and forty-four thousand*. Some have understood it of the sign of the cross, anciently made upon the foreheads of persons baptized. A ceremony as then used in the primitive, and as still retained in our established church, not only altogether innocent, but highly significant and proper. For it is no other than a constant admonition and token that the parties receiving it should from thenceforth *not be ashamed to confess the faith of Christ crucified*^g: and with allusion to the customs then obtaining among soldiers and servants, to receive the mark of that master or general under whose command they were; this was a listing men to Christ, a mark of their obligation to *fight manfully under his banner, and to continue his faithful soldiers and servants to their lives' end*.

Others, observing the sacrament of baptism at large to be frequently by the ancients styled *the signature of Christ*, apply the expression to that covenant in a sense somewhat more extended than the former. Meanwhile these constructions come much to one, in regard the latter very probably depends upon the former; for the sign of the cross, used in that sacrament, seems to have given occasion to the sacrament itself being allusively entitled, *signaculum, character, signum in frontibus*, the mark or signature of the disciples of Christ.

But, as hath been observed under the first particular, the seal here

intended cannot be reasonably thought that of profession, but is plainly a seal of preservation and protection. This case bears great resemblance to the Israelites' passover, mentioned before. Their eating the lamb and sprinkling the blood were necessary preliminaries; but the blood itself upon the door, as a testimony of the law being regularly complied with, was that which averted the destroying angel. Thus the seal of Christianity is so far only concerned in the present occasion, as this seal, being kept inviolate, engaged that other seal of Divine Providence and favour on their behalf who kept it so. And the peculiar care which Almighty God determined should be taken to rescue such from the common calamity, which overwhelmed others, not under the same distinguishing Providence, is by an elegant figure represented here as a visible character impressed for a direction to the executioners of Divine vengeance, that these were to be spared, as persons exempted from it.

It must be confessed indeed, that the grace and providence of Almighty God never shone forth upon any occasion more illustriously than in this of establishing and preserving the Christian church. For in regard that every good action (even those which have all possible advantages of present pleasure and gain to recommend them) is yet owing, not to any goodness in our nature, but, in its true and last result, is the effect of a Divine principle actuating and assisting us; how mighty must those influences be which could dispose and persuade, against all the inclinations of nature, not easy to be withstood, not possible to be extirpated, and against all temporal interest too, which was not likely, and, in lawful cases, not reasonable or fit to be neglected! How much more than human must that resignation of spirit be which submitted to incomprehensible articles of faith, and ungrateful rules of practice, upon the mere authority of a crucified Redeemer! which would be governed by a doctrine accounted foolishness, and expect rewards from a Master, whose ignominious death was a stumblingblock to his contemporaries and countrymen! To what Being less than omnipotent and unchangeable can we ascribe that immovable firmness of mind, which, in despite of all temptations to the contrary, did not only live up to, but cheerfully die for, such a religion as this; and, after a perpetual conflict with the reluctancies and infirmities of flesh and blood, esteemed it an honour and an happiness to put off that very flesh and blood, and gave up all the satisfactions of this to the promises of another, a future and unseen life! But especially, how amazing were those operations of the eternal Comforter, which could inspire the suffering saints of this day so to undergo, and their spectators so to behold, their most exquisite tortures and cruel deaths, that not only their brethren should be more confirmed, more ambitious of the honour of the like martyrdom, but that even strangers, even enemies, even their guards and executioners, should be thus gained over; and the number of converts at their dying hour should sometimes exceed those made by a long course of preaching and piety throughout a most laborious and exemplary life!

These are unquestionable facts, but such as are also unquestionably superior to any reasonings or powers merely human. Nor can we

suppose them effected by those ordinary assistances to which we owe the doing or even thinking any thing that is good. Their measures of grace were plainly proportionable to the trials that called for them; and as no cause was ever worth enduring so much for, so none was ever, by the supports afforded it, so manifestly proved to be of God. Nothing less than He could have enabled men of sense and soberness so eagerly to have embraced, so resolutely to have persevered in, such an institution: and he would not have thought Christianity worth such miraculous operations of his Spirit, had it not been his own institution. But,

2. Secondly, the providence of God was likewise wonderful, in ordering events so that the Christian church should be preserved against all the persecutions that attempted to overthrow, and all the errors and corruptions which must otherwise have depraved and undermined it. That the joint endeavours of Jews and Gentiles (agreed in nothing but their enmity to the Christians) should employ so much malice and subtlety without ever attaining the intended effect: that the multitudes cut off by their cruelty should be much more than supplied by successors of equal constancy and zeal, and justify the observation of a large harvest always springing up after every seedtime of such blood: that in the ravage and destruction of Jerusalem so nice a discrimination should be made, as rescued the body of Christians from the fate, which was indeed the punishment too, of the unbelieving Jews^b: that afterwards, amidst the many violent convulsions which shook and at last tore in pieces the Roman empire, the Church should stand firm upon her own basis, while all the world was tottering and breaking round about her: that, even when distressed and persecuted within herself, divided by heresies and schisms, clouded with superstition, degenerated into idolatry, bewildered with ignorance and a darkness which might even be felt, and treated by fellow-Christians, for refusing their corruptions, with a zeal as barbarous as it is blind, as unrelenting as Jewish rage or heathen tyranny: that she should then emerge, and recover her primitive lustre, after so long a darkness and such powerful endeavours to suppress her: these are events to which the vision now before us is most probably believed to allude; events not to be expected in the ordinary course of things. No. They are fruits of being sealed to a distinguishing care and protection; and such experiments of the Divine goodness and truth, as will no longer suffer us to doubt whether they be not pledges of Christ being with his faithful *always, even unto the end of the world.*

But while we are contemplating the wonders of that good Providence toward *the remnant that escaped*, far be it from us to suppose it defective in mercy toward them who fell a sacrifice to the fury of their persecutors. No: God had provided for those gallant men something better than any temporal deliverance. A place in heaven, in proportion higher and more honourable as their graces on earth were brighter and their sufferings more exquisite. A happiness that does infinitely more than compensate all they did or could possibly endure for his sake. And the nearer resemblance they bore to the indignities

^b Euseb. Hist. iii. 5.

and pains of their dying Redeemer heretofore, the nearer approaches they now make to his bliss and glory before the throne on high.

And this is the constancy, these the crowns of the church triumphant above, which the present festival obliges us to commemorate, no less than the continuance and preservation of a church still militant below. In both indeed we have an interest and part. For we all are members of one and the same body; differing at present in place and position only, till the common Head shall think fit, in his own time and by his own methods, to bring us all together, and to reward the trials of them that are coming after with joys like theirs who are already gone before.

I conclude with suggesting to my reader some few remarks from the love of God to his saints; a due improvement whereof would be the best and most Christian method of rendering to him and them the honours intended to both by the observation of this festival.

1. First then, the integrity of these *sealed*, and that purity of faith and worship so carefully maintained by them, may be of signal use to us when attacked with violent temptations to sin. It will represent to us, by their example, the possibility of resisting and overcoming all attempts made upon our virtue, by sincere resolutions and endeavours, backed with that grace which alone can render them effectual. It will fill us with assured expectation of and dependence upon all such necessary strength and assistances from God, provided we hold fast by him, and do not tamely desert his cause, which always is the cause of goodness and truth. It would guard us against the dangerous seducements of numbers and authority and examples; and not suffer us to love piety and virtue one whit the less, because not valued by the many, or not countenanced by the great. Quite contrary, it would possess us with a terrible apprehension of vices that have credit and vogue, and are grown fashionable in the world, when we reflect that these great champions of faith and holiness attained the honour and privilege of God's *seal* by an inflexible, even when a persecuted, singularity in the true religion. And this leads us naturally to a

2. Second remark, resulting from the eminent deliverances they were *sealed* to. These should convince us, however improbable discouraging circumstances may sometimes happen to render it, that abiding steadfastly by our duty is the best security with regard to our present interests. It often proves so in fact: it always proves so when God, for wise and better purposes, does not see fit to suffer the contrary. For in such cases the justice, the goodness, and the honour of God are concerned, not to forsake those good men in their distress, who made that very distress their choice, and refused to accept any other deliverance, in pure love and obedience to him. Such an assurance, that Providence is engaged on our behalf, should, even to private persons, be found a firmer support than any human appearances of safety or success. But there is another case not subject to the same reserves; and that is, the protection of the church in general, notwithstanding all the malice and subtlety of its manifold adversaries and insulters. A very comfortable reflection to all that love the Lord Jesus and his gospel. Such a one, in truth, as it were heartily to be

wished the dissoluteness of some, the profaneness of others, the industrious propagation of infidelity by a third sort, and, which gives success and encouragement to all these, the general lukewarmness and indifference of those who ought to oppose and suppress them, had not rendered almost the only anchor of our hope. For never sure could one have expected less, and yet never did religion suffer more, from an uncontrolled licentiousness of striking at the very fundamentals of Christianity than in our age and country. God in his mercy touch the consciences of those who take or who encourage or who connive at such liberties. God dispose us all with a becoming indignation to exercise the powers we have, or, if these be too feeble, to contrive new and more effectual methods for the suppressing and reforming them, lest these crying abominations be visited upon our nation in judgments suitable to the horror of their guilt. But I return, and observe,

3. Thirdly, that the sufferings and rewards of those saints who died in the cause of religion ought to be a most powerful incitement to our zeal and perseverance. They were men of like passions and infirmities with us, which takes off all pretence of their virtues being impracticable. The promises of Divine assistance are the same still, and therefore the like difficulties cannot be invincible. Their examples indeed are left us, and our memories are refreshed with them, for this very purpose, that we also should *run with patience the race that is set before us*. Their courage and constancy, their resignation and charity, should be copied by us as occasion requires. Their sincerity and devotion, the purity of their faith, the innocency of their conversation, their fruitfulness in good works, their contempt of the world, and heavenly-mindedness, should be patterns always before our eyes, because these are virtues that may and should be always in our practice. In a word, let us express our thanks to Almighty God for the advantage of such shining examples, and pay all due reverence to their memory by endeavouring to be like them. For when all is done, the best and most acceptable honour we can possibly do these renowned Christian heroes is that of forming our conduct upon the model of their graces, and aspiring after the weight and the brightness of their crowns.

THE GOSPEL. St. Matt. v. i.

1 *Jesus, seeing the multitudes, went up into a mountain: and when he was set, his disciples came unto him:*

2 *And he opened his mouth, and taught them, saying,*

3 *Blessed are the *poor in spirit: for their's is the kingdom of heaven.*

men of lowly and humble hearts; for these will dispose them to receive my doctrine here, and that will lead them to the glory of heaven hereafter.

4 *Blessed are they that *mourn: for they shall be comforted.*

3. *They that have the true spirit of poverty, the

4. *They that sorrow for their sins; for this will work repentance to life and salvation.

5 *Blessed are the *meek: for they shall inherit the earth.*

tranquillity of spirit will make their lives comfortable, and give the truest enjoyment of such a state as God sees fit for them, a state happy here as well as hereafter.

6 *Blessed are they *which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled.*

defects, labour as hard to be so as any, whose necessities and appetites of the body are strongest, do after the supplies they feel the present want of: such desires shall never be in vain.

7 *Blessed are the *merciful: for they shall obtain mercy.*

relieve, the needy and afflicted; that forgive and pray for those who have injured or offended them; that are ready to do any kind and compassionate office whatsoever: God will reward such by the returns of his mercy to them.

8 *Blessed are the *pure in heart: for they shall see God.*

defilements of lust, and all sorts of vicious affections, God will communicate knowledge and grace to such here, and admit them to the beautiful vision of himself hereafter.

9 *Blessed are the *peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God.*

and endeavour to preserve and promote peace, both public and private, among others. This disposition renders them like God, and they shall have both the name and the privileges of his children.

10 *Blessed are they which are persecuted for *righteousness' sake: for their's is the kingdom of heaven.*

is the kingdom of heaven. Such shall have large amends made for all they endure upon such accounts.

11 *Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake.*

12 *Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you.*

the prophets and most celebrated saints, should make the reproaches and malice and causeless calumnies of your persecutors matter of great joy to you.

5. *They that are patient, and slow to anger; for this

and slow to anger; for this

6. *They that desire to be truly good, and, in a just sense of their infirmities and

6. *They that desire to be truly good, and, in a just sense of their infirmities and

7. *They that pity, and to their power comfort and

7. *They that pity, and to their power comfort and

8. *They that preserve their minds free from the

8. *They that preserve their minds free from the

9. *They who are orderly and peaceable themselves,

9. *They who are orderly and peaceable themselves,

10. *They who suffer for the profession of the true

10. *They who suffer for the profession of the true

11, 12. And blessed are ye in particular when such

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COMMENT.

THE Scripture read for the Epistle gave us occasion to consider the peculiar favour of God toward those faithful servants of his, of whom this festival is designed to transmit an honourable remembrance to all posterity. There we saw the distinguishing Providence which guarded them while militant in this, and somewhat of that triumphant state to

which they are ascended in a better world. The Gospel, in order to our more ready attainment of advantages which we are by this time presumed earnestly to desire, sets before us those good dispositions which recommend the saints to the care and protection, and exalt them to the dwelling and fruition of God. For the privileges of good men we have the beloved disciple's authority; for their happiness and the way to it, both, we have the word of the Master himself, who at once pronounces such persons *blessed*, and instructs us how they come to be so.

The virtues here mentioned, and the particular blessedness appor-
tioned to each, are a subject too copious to be now entered upon. I shall therefore satisfy myself with making a few general remarks, first upon the beatitudes themselves, and then upon those virtuous actions and good dispositions which are prescribed as means proper for attaining them.

1. Under the former head I would bespeak my reader's attention in the first place to the fitness of that method taken by our Lord to inculcate his doctrines, and give them their due weight with his hearers. He is our supreme Lawgiver, and as such had an indisputable right to deliver himself in an imperial style. Nor could we have found reason to decline our obedience, had his pleasure been signified to us without any other enforcement than that of his own authority. But he forbore to do so upon this occasion, and chose a course more suitable to his own character, to the temper of that religion he was about to establish, and to the natural springs of moral actions.

The character he appeared among men in was that of love and gentleness, of meekness and condescension. From all which the asserting his dominion over mankind would have been as averse and foreign as it is generally thought agreeable to the state and greatness of earthly princes. They find it necessary to suffer no diminution of their power, and therefore they neglect no awful appearances of it that may secure the submission of their people. He was a King too, higher than the highest, but the season was not yet come for acting openly in that capacity. And therefore this, like the other glories of the Godhead, was to continue hidden from human eyes under the veil of a despised and even less than common man. His life and doctrine, his sufferings and death, his resurrection and return to heaven, his Spirit sent from thence, and the infinite works of wonder done in his name, were by degrees to reveal and make way for the belief of his majesty and glory. And therefore, in the execution of his prophetic office, upon which he was now lately set out, it sufficed that he spoke with the authority of a teacher only. And, considering the predictions that even in this respect concerned him, (such as are referred to particularly at the xiith of this Gospel¹;) he saw it more congruous to abstain from all marks of a high hand at the entrance of this discourse, and was content rather to instruct and persuade than to command.

2. This behaviour did likewise best become the temper of that religion which our blessed Saviour was about to establish. The apostles frequently take notice of a wide difference between the law and the

gospel; as in other respects, so especially upon account of the different passions each was designed to work upon. With the Jews God dealt as with servants, and the chief principle of obedience to that institution was fear. But Christians are treated as children, and the motive proper to their duty is love. Hence the law was promulgated with all the pomp of terror, and enforced with curses and denunciations of vengeance. But it was fit for the gospel to recommend itself by a more generous and engaging style, and to gain upon the hearts of its proselytes by promises of blessedness and rewards. The objects chiefly in view of the former were the Divine attributes of justice and power, whereby a refractory people might be frightened into good manners. Those set before the latter are infinite mercy and goodness, whereby a free and ingenuous people, obliged beyond all possibility of requital, might yet be shamed into such returns as they were capable of, and powerfully excited to imitate those excellencies to which they were indebted for so glorious hopes and happiness. And therefore their invitations to duty here are like their duty itself, in which there is nothing awful and servile, but all the effect of filial affection and gratitude on the one part, all tenderness and paternal indulgence on the other. A duty not imposed for the ostentation of authority, or the exercise of an arbitrary power, but for the sake and benefit of those who pay it. And therefore so imposed as to lay the foundation of obedience, in a sense and conviction of the advantages attending it. Upon which account our Lord's method here is admirable, because,

3. It is best accommodated to the natural springs of human and moral actions. Happiness is the natural desire of every man; and what God hath given all a desire of, he hath certainly given all a capacity of too. This therefore is the common end and view, be the means used for the attainment of it never so different. The general schemes of life are laid according to their supposed tendency hither; and each action is meant for a step toward this common home. It is not possible to be otherwise with them that think at all; and therefore the philosophers, in their treatises of morality, constantly set out with an inquiry after the chief good. Most reasonably, sure. For what can be more absurd than to lay down rules of living, before the point be settled what purpose men live for? Or how shall a competent judgment be made of the fitness of any means by them who as yet remain in ignorance or doubt what end it is which those means ought to serve? Thus far then our Lord hath conformed to the method of all wise moralists; but with very different success. For we should be highly unjust both to his wisdom and our own profit, did we overlook the advantages of his above any of their proceedings in the following respects particularly.

First, as he hath delivered men out of those mazes of uncertainty and error in which the philosophers had left them bewildered concerning their chief good. The chief *present* good I mean; for the collections of nature, unassisted by revelation, never undertook positively to determine concerning any other state; much less to lay that down as a maxim and foundation, able to bear the weight of whole systems

built upon it. Now in this very first principle the variety of opinions was as great as that of sects. And what was like to become of them at last, who, in their pursuit of happiness, followed guides so far from knowing the way, that they were not yet agreed about the place whither they should go? Thus far then our blessed Saviour hath brought us forward; that we are plainly taught to abandon and despise those mistaken seducers who proposed any thing sordid and sensual as their end, and imagined the utmost attainable to here to consist either in the gratification or the stupfaction of our passions. He plainly gives it on the side of those more exalted spirits who rightly judged our present happiness to consist in minds rightly disposed, and in virtuous actions suitable to such dispositions.

2. But here again our Lord hath exceeded all that went before, in correcting their mistakes, and leaving us right notions of the best and most profitable virtues. For even they who placed happiness in virtue before never chose such instances as these. Justice and temperance, prudence and fortitude, and all that flattered our natural vanity by a seeming greatness of soul, were readily admitted into their schemes. But poverty of spirit and meekness, mercifulness and peaceableness, were paradoxes till now unknown to the inquirers after happiness. Least of all could it have entered into any of their heads that persecution, upon any account whatsoever, renders a man blessed. Some indeed had the hardness to assert that it did not make a good man miserable. But few in comparison were content to go thus far; and none ever came up near our Lord's assertion; none could, by reason of a most material defect in theirs, which is now supplied by the Christian philosophy, and by that only. For,

3. We have the advantage, not of a present only, but of a future blessedness also, revealed and promised to the virtues here enjoined. They who taught that happiness consisted in virtue made the nearest approach to truth; but then this notion obliged them to advance in speculation doctrines instantly refuted by practice and experience. The composition of human nature was not duly regarded; the unavoidable frailties and sufferings of spirits confined to such bodies as ours scornfully overlooked: and consequently, the systems of the Stoics and others became impracticable and unsatisfactory; because propounding encouragements insufficient for human nature, and supposing men more abstracted and refined than they are or can be in the present state of things.

It is therefore the inestimable privilege of Christians—and we ought to acknowledge it with thankfulness—that to us, to us alone, is given the prospect of a compensation, equal, far superior indeed, to the difficulties of our duty. And Christ could never have been heard with the success these doctrines have since found, had not a *comfort* been promised to the *mourners*, an *inheritance* to the *meek*, a *right of God* to the *pure*, and a *kingdom of heaven* to the *poor in spirit* and *persecuted*, with which all other masters of morality were altogether unacquainted.

As therefore the instances and degrees of duty here prescribed are in great measure new, so are the motives to them in great measure

new also. The present conveniences to which these virtues have a natural tendency are of great weight, though not enough in all cases. But when those present conveniences are shewn to be but small, in comparison of the infinite reward hereafter prepared for the practice of them, the choice of many mortifications and sufferings, which otherwise would hardly if at all have been justified, does then become not only reasonable, but necessary. For when our Legislator stoops to our desires, meets our most eager wishes, and shews us how to be what every man designs and longs to be, we can have no excuse for not complying. This is a condescending appeal to nature and inclination; and renders all disobedience unaccountable and absurd, by representing our duty and our happiness as one and the same thing. Till therefore we are able (which we shall never be) to prove a repugnancy between these two, let not our lives reproach us with acting in contradiction to rules and maxims which in speculation and argument we cannot elude the force of.

II. Concerning the dispositions prescribed here for the attainment of true blessedness, I observe,

First, that most of them are what we call *moral*, and many of them *social* virtues. The former will be a warning to my reader, what men of skill those are, and how far endued with the spirit of Christ, who upon all occasions disparage moral virtues as mean and legal, and beneath the dignity of spiritualized Christians; who blame us for not preaching Jesus Christ and his gospel, when we preach what Jesus Christ himself preached and practised; who slanderously misrepresent this Established Church as derogating from faith and grace, because her ministers urge upon their people those good works which our Saviour says, in this very chapter^k, ought so to *shine as to be seen of men*; which St. James^l demands as the necessary evidences of a true and living faith; which St. Paul declares to be *the fruits of the Spirit*^m; and which if a man *do not*, St. John pronounces him to be *not of God, but of the devil*ⁿ. How dangerous is the delusion of those poor souls who give themselves up to the guidance of such teachers! How safe and comfortable that communion whose guides, in this regard, bear no reproach but what falls upon the apostles and their blessed Master himself! For so long as their Epistles are allowed, we shall never be convicted for thus detracting from grace and faith: and so long as his sermon on the mount stands upon record, this will vindicate our endeavours to bring our flocks to heaven by taking the way that Christ first led them in.

But I likewise observed that many of them are *social* virtues; such as mankind are benefited and endeared to each other by. Of this kind are humility and meekness and mercy and peaceableness. (And if, as some have done, we shall interpret the sixth verse of justice in our dealings, we may add righteousness also.) Now it is plain God could not have expressed a greater friendliness for the common good of the world and the comforts of society, than by first enjoining the virtues that promote these excellent ends, and then providing such ample compensation in another world for habits and practices which

^k Matt. v. 16.

^l James ii. 14, &c.

^m Gal. v. 22; Eph. v. 9.

ⁿ 1 John iii. 10.

self will be always opposing in this world. So plainly is he the best Christian who is the greatest benefactor to order and peace and love. And so much more precious is an active charity than an idle and unprofitable, though never so rapturous, contemplation, in his eyes who prefers *mercy before sacrifice*, and who is ever doing good to all his creatures.

2. I observe of these virtues, secondly, that they are plain and easy marks to judge of our blessedness by. Many of them are such as will render themselves conspicuous to other people; but it is impossible for any of them not to be discernible to a careful examiner of his own breast. And this is an inquiry that deserves all our care. For since we all cannot but desire to be happy, and since we must be so, or otherwise, according as we excel or are defective in these good qualities; who that is so would want the satisfaction of knowing it? Who that is not, would not gladly be awakened by such a sense of his misery as might effectually engage his utmost endeavours to become so? The spirit and temper of a Christian, as here described, does indeed differ greatly from that of the world. And this difference is another argument for our circumspection: without which men are too apt to flatter their own consciences, because like unto or not worse than the generality of them they live among. But alas! this fallacy, if indulged, will ruin all. For it is not custom or common opinion, but the rules and measures of the gospel, by which this most concerning point must be determined. And let all the world say or act as they please, it is not more certain that the persons thus qualified shall, than it is that none but they (ordinarily speaking) shall, ever partake of the blessedness here promised.

3. Lastly, when this inquiry is made, we must not content ourselves with a partial return to it, or imagine that one or a few of these qualities will entitle us to happiness, if they be manifestly not accompanied by the rest. For, without entering into any niceties about the number, the order, or the necessary connexion of the virtues here enjoined, it is evident from the whole tenor of Scripture that God requires in every one of us all the dispositions of mind here mentioned; and looks that each should exert its proper acts as fit occasions offer. The *merciful* shall obtain no *mercy* from God, if he be impure; nor shall the *pure* see God, if he be not *peaceable*. In short, they are all bound upon us by the same authority, and all must go to the composition of a perfect Christian. Even the preparation to undergo persecution for righteousness and Christ's sake is necessary, though God never bring us into circumstances of reducing that readiness into act. But persecution alone had never exalted the martyrs and confessors of this day, had not their other virtues, like so many jewels, adorned and added lustre to that crown they now wear in heaven. The brightness wherof we justly praise God for; and do best express our thanks by aspiring after it in the way they have gone before us. Which he give us grace to do, for his blessed Son's sake, the Captain of their and our salvation, Christ Jesus. To whom, &c.

THE FIFTH DAY OF NOVEMBER.

THE EPISTLE. Rom. xiii. 1.

[The same with the fourth Sunday after Epiphany.]

THE GOSPEL. St. Luke ix. 51.

51 *And it came to pass, when the time was come that he should be received up, he stedfastly set his face to go to Jerusalem,* he knew was determined for his leaving the world, Jesus began his journey to the place where he was to suffer with all the marks of undaunted resolution.

52 *And sent messengers before his face : and they went, and entered into a village of the Samaritans, to make ready for him.*

53 *And they did not receive him, because his face was as though he would go to Jerusalem.*

54 *And when his disciples James and John saw this, they said, Lord, wilt thou that we command fire to come down from heaven, and consume them, even as Elias did ?*

55 *But he turned, and rebuked them, and said, * Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of.* 55. * You are not sensible how contrary so vindictive a zeal is to the temper of that religion which I am now forming you to.

56 *For the Son of man is not come to destroy men's lives, but to save them. And they went to another village.* 56. And indeed to my example too ; whose design of appearing in the world is not to do hurt but good to men, even in their worldly interests and capacities.

COMMENT.

OF the separation between the Jews and the Samaritans in matters of religion, the influence this had to obstruct their civil intercourse, and the extravagant heights to which their quarrels were carried, I have already had occasion to give my reader some account. The subject then before us was a generous good man, whose behaviour to a Jew in distress proved him to have got above the common prejudices of his countrymen. Those very prejudices, whence that deportment to our blessed Lord proceeded, which provoked the indignation of two apostles to a high degree. So high as to be rebuked here by their Master, as too fierce and revengeful in its nature, too horrid and destructive in its effects, to be allowed in any who, in calling themselves his disciples, profess to make his doctrine and example the rule and standard of their temper and their actions.

When we shall have considered (1.) the ground of that offence

* Gospel for the thirteenth Sunday after Trinity.

taken here by these Samaritans, (2.) the occasion of the apostles' proposal thereupon, and (3.) the argument made use of by our Saviour for rejecting it; my reader will not only see this passage in its true light, but very easily account for the making it a part of the service appointed for this day of joy and thanksgiving.

1. As to the first of these, it does by no means appear that the inhabitants of Samaria were thus inhospitable at all times and to all Jews: but seems much more probable that there was something in the season, and something in the person too, that now particularly might dispose them so to be.

The evangelist is here relating how our Lord left the parts of Galilee, which had, for two years and a half of his ministry, been the chief scene of his miracles and preaching. He was now removing into Judæa, with an intent to employ the six months next before his passion in that country where those greater dangers awaited him, which, at the passover following, ended in his apprehension and death. From the certain prospect hereof it is that St. Luke is thought to have intimated his immovable resolution and constancy by that expression of *steadfastly setting his face to go to Jerusalem*^b. Now this journey is the same with that mentioned at the seventh of St. John, when he followed his relations privately to *the feast of tabernacles*. The schismatics in Samaria had their solemn feasts likewise, though not exactly at the same times: and of that, instituted in imitation of, but withal in opposition to, this particular feast, the Scripture gives an account as old as the first breach made in the reign of Jeroboam^c. The travelling therefore through their country with a declared purpose of solemnizing this festival at Jerusalem was looked upon as an affront to their way of worship. For it argued our Lord's judgment in this case to be, that Jerusalem was the only place where these feasts could be regularly celebrated; and consequently, that the keeping them in mount Gerizim and the temple there was a presumptuous innovation, directly contrary to the will and law of God.

All this is the more observable, because our Lord did certainly pass this way at other times, and yet no notice is taken of the like refusals to entertain him^d. Nor do we find that his brethren, who at this time went upon the same occasion, were put to any difficulties. Very likely they were not: but the different character of the persons seems to have caused this different sort of treatment. The opinions and practices of common men might be thought not worth regard. But it would be of mighty consequence for a person so eminent as Jesus to declare against them. And since his going to worship at Jerusalem on this solemn occasion would in all common acceptance bear this meaning, they contrived to prevent, as much as in them lay, the influences it was feared that supposed indignity might have, by revenging it with another of not *receiving him*. An expedient very proper for the purpose they intended it should serve: because such refusal was a constructive disavowing of his authority, and a plain warning to all people that, what esteem soever others might have of this famed man, they themselves took him for no prophet.

^b Ver. 51.

^c 1 Kings xii. 23—33.

^d John iv.

Thus we may very well account for the Samaritans' churlishness upon the present occasion; though it should be allowed, as I see not why it may not, that our Lord himself might at another time, and that others did at the same time, find better quarter from them. Meanwhile these circumstances do not only explain the reasons of their rough behaviour, but help us toward a right apprehension of the

II. Second thing in order; the proposal made by those apostles whose zeal was provoked by it^c. To make this they were encouraged by the example of Elias, whose action, here referred to, stood thus. He had foretold the speedy death of a wicked prince, and stopped the messengers sent, in contempt of the God of Israel, to consult an idol of the Philistines at Ekron. The king enraged sends an officer with fifty men^d, who had no more reverence for the true God or his messenger than their great master. They accost him indeed with the title of *man of God*^e, but that seems to be given him in mockery and scorn. For their design was to apprehend and carry him to Ahaziah, that he and his mother Jezebel might have the pleasure of revenge upon one whose predictions had so often been a terror, and his preservations a disappointment, to that idolatrous and bloody family. The prophet, thus insulted^h, begged of God to assert his own honour, and by fire from heaven to consume those assaulters, as an evidence of his being in reality that *man of God* which they in derision had styled him. His prayer was heard accordingly both then and a second time upon an equal number, who, not dismayed with the fate of the first detachment, had the hardiness to follow with the same malicious purpose, and to accost Elijah in the same profane drollery. This was the event upon which the two apostles ground their question, *Lord, wilt thou that we command fire to come down from heaven, and consume them, even as Elias did*ⁱ?

A motion that speaks the highest veneration imaginable for their Master, and the most zealous concern for his honour. The affront was in both cases thus far alike, that each was an interpretative denial of a Divine authority delegated to the prophet respectively concerned. The safety of our Lord's person was not attempted as Elijah's had been, but the dignity of it was so far superior, as, they conceived, might justly expose the committers of any insolence against him to a punishment equally severe and miraculous. And of his power, and the readiness of his Father to assert him against any contemners of his miracles and doctrine, they make so little doubt, that, without any address of his own, they promised themselves the same success with Elias, provided they might have his leave to put up the same prayer. For they concluded that God, who was so careful to vindicate his servant, would be much more jealous of the honour of his Son: that Son, to whom they had so lately seen that very servant pay homage at his transfiguration in the mount^k.

Besides this well-meant zeal, countenanced by so great an example, there is yet more that may be alleged in excuse for these apostles. The Samaritans were confessedly heretics and schismatics: their

^c Luke ix. 54.

^d 2 Kings i. 2—8.

^e Ver. 9.

^h Ver. 10—12.

ⁱ Luke ix. 54.

^k Ver. 30, 35.

whole worship was a manifest and most presumptuous violation of the Divine law: this rejection of Christ was the utmost mark of their detestation of that law, and of him for observing it: the destruction which they were supposed to deserve upon these accounts, James and John, though heated with indignation, did not undertake to be instruments and actors in, but only proposed to beg of God that he would inflict it in such extraordinary way as might evidence his displeasure: this request to God they did not presume to make till they had first consulted our Lord concerning the fitness of it; and upon his disliking it, they immediately acquiesced, and patiently took the rebuke of their ignorance and rash resentment.

But now if, instead of all or any of these precautions, bold men shall take into their own hands that work of vengeance which God in Scripture claims as his own peculiar; if they shall attempt the destruction of such as they causelessly brand with the odious imputations of schism and heresy; if, instead of waiting for a commission from Christ, they shall proceed in direct opposition to this and other declarations of his will in matters of the like nature; if, lastly, for the effecting their barbarous designs, they shall enter into measures of treachery and cruelty; measures not only unknown to Christianity, but breaking in upon all civil obligations, and a contradiction to all common humanity: how far the condition of such men would be distant from that of the apostles now before us, I leave the impartial reader to consider and judge.

One can hardly suppose indeed the power of prejudice itself to be so great as to mislead men in the latter of these cases, who observe that the former (notwithstanding so many circumstances which extenuate and make it almost nothing when compared with the other) is yet disallowed and reprov'd in the manner which comes next to be represented in my

III. Third particular. For this consists of the argument chosen by our Saviour for rejecting the apostles' proposal: *He turned, and rebuked them, and said, Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of. For the Son of man is not come to destroy men's lives, but to save them.* This argument quite takes off the only colour urged by the apostles. For it imports that Elias, great and eminent though he were in his day, is not yet a pattern to be followed throughout in the *days of the Son of man.* He lived under a dispensation of severity and terror, to which the avenging outrageous injuries done to God's ministers by very dreadful and immediate judgments was agreeable enough. But the gospel is a dispensation of compassion and love: an institution good to mankind in all their interests and capacities. And in regard means must be constantly suited to their ends, nothing could be more incongruous and absurd than to promote this by methods of rigour and revenge.

What Elias did, the event demonstrated to proceed from an extraordinary impulse of God's Spirit; what these disciples would have done, the disallowance of it as evidently proves to have come from a private instinct of their own: the operations of the Spirit tend now to beneficence and mercy. In uncommon emergencies that require it,

God, it is true, hath not been wanting to exert his vindictive power. He asserted the authority of St. Peter by the sudden death of Ananias and Sapphira¹; and of St. Paul, by smiting Elymas with blindness^m. But these are very rare and exempt cases. They must not be drawn into consequence and practice, because it is scarce possible either that the like occasions should happen, or that the same assurances of acting in them by the dictates of the Holy Ghost should be ever obtained again. The apostles therefore and the governors of the church, in the ordinary course of their ministry, and private Christians in their demeanour towards each other, are to follow such standing rules as he, who best understood the temper and design, the interest and the honour, of his own religion, hath set a copy of in his behaviour, and left directions for in his doctrine. And what measures his example and his precepts lead to, a very little reflection upon each may suffice to instruct us.

His example was in this kind the most perfect that had been or ever will be set to the world. Nothing appeared in his temper and whole conversation but gentleness and sweetness. His instructions were delivered in the softest and simplest manner: the advantages of receiving and the sin and danger of rejecting them were proposed fairly and calmly, without any force, except that of argument: the result of all was an appeal to the reason and the consciences of men; such as left a liberty of choice, and did not labour to compel, but to persuade and win them over to their own good. When any unacceptable things were necessary to be spoken, his care to avoid all exasperation was evident in the frequent recourse had to parables; a method the least offensive, and that which threw off all the invidious part of application upon the hearer's own private reflections. When any severity of reproof or sharpness of language mingled with his discourses, these were the effect of charity and great tenderness. Partly for awakening the guilty themselves into a sense of those provocations which extorted them; and partly for undeceiving poor well-meaning people, by a discovery of those prejudices and corruptions to which their too popular guides kept them in bondage. The numberless injuries and affronts with which he was followed met usually with no other return than removing (as here) to another place, withdrawing out of the way of his enemies' fury, restraining them from acting their wickedness, while he consulted the safety of his own person: nay, his last indignities and torments and death gave proof of a meekness invincible, by praying and dying for his enemies and persecutors. And, which brings all home to the point we are upon, he was injured, affronted, hated, persecuted, scourged, and crucified, upon no other account than that of thinking and teaching in matters of religion differently from those outrageous zealots who dealt so inhumanly with him.

2. Such were the shining beauties of his life. And for his doctrines, we have lately observedⁿ, that the virtues which thus adorned his own practice he began his Divine sermon on the mount with recommending, as a rule and model for all his disciples to form their character

¹ Acts vi.^m Acts xiii.ⁿ Gospel on All Saints.

upon. The whole body indeed of the Christian precepts is calculated for universal benevolence and mutual compassion, for infirmities, misunderstandings, and misdemeanours. It is the glory and excellence of this religion to advance peace and love, to tie the bands of friendship closer and stronger, and to advance every disposition that can render society more easy and delightful, more useful and engaging. It enlarges our kindness to *those that are without*, corrects our disdain, and forbids all odious distinctions that pretend to countenance our uncharitableness or pride toward any who partake of the same human nature. It knits together *those that are within* by titles and relations, nearer and more endearing than any that either civil or sacred institutions had united men in before. All which deserve the more to be considered, because it is the unhappiness of these later ages that the heats and animosities which disturb our parts of the world are kindled and kept up, not between them that own Christ and them that deny him, but between those that are agreed in *naming the name of Christ*, and yet, because they differ in the manner of doing it, will needs be rending and tearing and devouring one another. They all profess to know and serve their Lord; but if some refuse to resolve that knowledge into the dictates of an infallible chair, others curse and condemn and debar them not only the privileges of Christians, but even that common faith and fair treatment which belongs to them as men.

What a palpable contradiction are these violent proceedings to those rules which command all followers of the meek and holy Jesus to be *kindly affectioned one to another*^o; to *love as brethren*¹; to be *pitiful*, to be *courteous*²; to *lay aside all bitterness and wrath*³; to *show out of a good conversation their works with meekness of wisdom*⁴; to *bear with the infirmities of the weak*⁵; not to *fight or strive*, but to be *gentle toward all men...patient, in meekness instructing those that oppose themselves*⁶! How different a conduct is this from that enjoined by Christ to his apostles, that when *one city persecuted them they should flee to another*⁷! Who, if their doctrines were not entertained, had no more to do than to warn the refractory of their danger, and quietly to withdraw. How much otherwise did he himself act in the case now before us! who retired, as a Romish expositor honestly remarks⁸, “to teach the propagators of his gospel how they ought to behave themselves when anywhere repulsed; namely, to take it patiently, and go off somewhither else;” and, “treading in their Lord’s steps, to keep their temper as becometh saints.”

Should the modern sons of zeal have imitated this pattern, they had saved themselves the reproach of this day’s disappointment, and their innocent brethren the just apprehensions what may be the consequences of a restless principle, that could submit to a design blacker than can be paralleled in story, and that watches all opportunities to annoy, embroil, and overturn a truly primitive church. Nay, they had prevented a great deal of reproach, which ignorant and unwary people will naturally cast upon Christianity itself. For how vain must such think the glory it assumes, of making the *wolf and the lamb lie down*

^o Rom. xii. 10. ¹ 1 Pet. iii. 8. ² Ephes. iv. 31. ³ James iii. 13. ⁴ Rom. xv. 1.

⁵ 2 Tim. ii. 24, 25. ⁶ Matt. x. 23; Luke x. 8—11. ⁷ Lucas Bruges.

together, when they see those who call themselves the only *lambs* of Christ, in a pretended zeal for this very religion, acting the part of treacherous and ravenous *wolves*!

God in his mercy touch the hearts of all who profess his gospel with a due sense and detestation of such absurd wickedness, that his name and truth may no longer be blasphemed by the enemies of his Son; that there may no longer be envying or strife, *hurting or destroying in all his holy mountain*, but that the spirit of knowledge and meekness and love may reign there, and fill the whole earth with the fruits of righteousness and peace.

But if so great a blessing cannot be yet obtained, may the same good God still prove himself our God, by preserving this church and nation both from partaking in the sins and suffering by the attempts of our hitherto implacable adversaries. And may we never either forget or neglect to improve as we ought the signal and repeated mercies of this auspicious day. *For which, to our watchful and most mighty Protector, be ascribed by us and our posterity honour and praise, adoration and thanksgiving, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.*

THE THIRTIETH DAY OF JANUARY.

King Charles's Martyrdom.

THE EPISTLE. St. Peter ii. 13—22.

[See Epistle for the second and third Sunday after Easter.]

THE GOSPEL. St. Matt. xxi. 33.

33 *There was a certain householder^a, which planted a vineyard, and hedged it round about, and digged a winepress in it, and built a tower, and let it out to husbandmen, and went into a far country:*

34 *And when the time of the fruit drew near, he sent his servants to the husbandmen, that they might receive the fruits of it.*

35 *And the husbandmen took his servants, and beat one, and killed another, and stoned another.*

36 *Again, he sent other servants more than the first: and they did unto them likewise.*

37 *But last of all he sent unto them his son, saying, They will reverence my son.*

38 *But when the husbandmen saw the son, they said among themselves, This is the heir; come, let us kill him, and let us seize on his inheritance.*

39 *And they caught him, and cast him out of the vineyard, and slew him.*

40 *When the lord therefore of the vineyard cometh, what will he do unto those husbandmen?*

^a Isaiah xi. 9.

^a See the Comment.

41 *They say unto him, He will miserably destroy those wicked men, and will let out his vineyard unto other husbandmen, which shall render him the fruits in their seasons.*

COMMENT.

THE use proper to be now made of this parable is, first, to explain it so far as shall be necessary; secondly, to observe the ends our Lord designed it for; and lastly, to shew how pertinent a subject it makes for our meditations upon this day.

I. I know not whether there be in Scripture any allegory more frequent or more significant than that which resembles the church of God to a vine and a vineyard. Some reasons that might prefer this before other comparisons have been touched upon already^b. But for our Saviour's use of it here we need look no further than this one; that the meaning of such allusions must needs be obvious and easy to persons daily conversant in the Law and the Prophets. Accordingly we find the application readily made; and that no doubt remained among the audience either concerning the matter of the reproofs couched in this parable, or the persons to whom those reproofs did of right belong.

They presently apprehended the *vineyard* here to signify the Jewish people, considered in their spiritual capacity: the *householder*, who *planted and hedged it about*, to be Almighty God; who had blessed them with the communications of his revealed will, made this distinction between them and the world in common, and by laws and ordinances peculiar to themselves enclosed them as his own possession. The *winepress* and *tower*, and other suitable conveniences, were no less natural representations of all the advantages and opportunities afforded them for serving him acceptably: and the *letting this vineyard out to husbandmen*, while *himself went into a far country*, imported the care of them committed to their governors and instructors; by the ordinary course of whose ministry they were to be taught and kept in their duty, without expecting such extraordinary marks of God's constant presence and immediate direction as appeared at his first forming them into a church. It was therefore at the hands of these rulers and teachers that the householder expected the fruits: because the barrenness of a soil so kindly and so well prepared could proceed only from their negligence to cultivate it; and they, in the very nature of their post, were accountable for the product to the lord of the fee. Meanwhile, these fruits are no other than returns of duty proportioned to the advantages of knowing and performing it: an awful regard to their laws; a readiness to repent of their faults, and to rectify their errors when warned of them; and a sincere desire to improve under any more perfect discoveries of the Divine will that should hereafter be made to them.

Accordingly, at the season proper to expect they should be answered^d, this householder sent servants to make his demands. The virtues and good effects of so gracious a dispensation not appearing, God commissioned his prophets to reprove, exhort, and quicken by

^b See Gospel for St. Mark's day.

^c Ver. 33.

^d Ver. 34.

denunciations of vengeance and promises of reward, as men should reject or be reformed by their messages. Messages which principally concerned the husbandmen; because through their carelessness or corruption it was that *this vineyard brought forth wild grapes*: i. e. that the people degenerated into idolatry and superstition; neglected the substance, and took up with the form of godliness; let go the law of their God, and held fast the tradition of their elders.

These servants got little or nothing for their master^e; and suffered severely themselves for so unacceptable a message. The prophets, that is, from time to time, (for that is the meaning of the errands so often repeated,) instead of making any good impression, were the object of these rulers' scorn and hatred^f. The vices of the people were now grown profitable; the more these were corrupted, the more they were at the devotion of their masters: and therefore these great men soon rid their hands of the prophets, as often as any of them attempted to preach a return to God, and the weightier matters of the law; because this was by consequence a breaking the yoke of bondage, to those who debauched the manners purely to get an absolute dominion over the fortunes and persons of their charge.

After several ineffectual dispatches by messengers of meaner quality^g, the lord of the vineyard resolves upon sending his son; from a presumption that his character would not fail to command respect, and another sort of reception. Hereby we understand God's decree to send his blessed Son, the Messiah; but with this caution, that those words, *They will reverence my son*, which in their literal sense comport very well with the *householder*, be not, with regard to Almighty God, wrested to a sense implying any ignorance of the event which this mission afterwards had. He knew and clearly foresaw every circumstance of that contumelious treatment his Son found from these husbandmen: he sent him to be crucified and slain by their wicked hands: but by this expression (necessary to preserve the decorum of a parable, but not to be too nicely insisted on in the application) God condescends to be represented as one of us; who usually say those things will be done, which there is all the reason in the world to expect should be done. Or, as St. Chrysostom, he giveth this intimation, that, notwithstanding any prescience of his, the actions of men, that bring to pass events before determined by his providence, are the actors' own choice, and that all the guilt or virtue of them will be placed to their account.

In either of these senses that passage will consist with the deportment of those husbandmen who immediately conspired the murder of the *heir*^h, for that very reason, because he was the heir; and that they might thenceforth *seize on his inheritance*. The priests and rulers were sensible that none could over come to them with clearer marks of a Divine authority, none more endanger their power and popularity, than the Messiah, Jesus Christ: and therefore, after having long laboured in vain to fix upon him the reproaches of blasphemer, impostor, and mover of sedition; to discredit him, sometimes with one, sometimes with another set of men; they found means to have that in-

^e Ver. 35, 36. ^f Compare Mark xii. 7. with Luke xx. 10, 11.

^g Ver. 37.

^h Ver. 38.

nocent and excellent Person put to a cruel and ignominious death¹. And triumphed in that expedient as an effectual security for the future exercise of their avarice and ambition without rebuke or control.

But see the consequence. The ingratitude and insolence of the husbandmen here represented constrained the hearers to acknowledge it a most probable and fit thing for the lord of the vineyard to dispossess and destroy those wretches, and provide himself with other husbandmen^k, more true to their trust, and more sensible of the honour of having it reposed in them. This image (that is) of what the Jewish rulers had done and were about to do, manifests the justness of that punishment they thus drew upon themselves and their whole nation, when God turned those very measures to their destruction upon which they chiefly depended for the safety and establishment of their usurped dominion over the people's consciences. For he utterly destroyed their city, dispersed their people, and carried his gospel to the Gentiles, whose spirit and behaviour proved them more worthy objects of this unexpected mercy.

II. After so large an explanation of the parable itself, there will need the less to be added upon my second head. For by this time I take it to be very evident that our blessed Lord's design in it was twofold: first, to detect the wickedness of the persons concerned in it; and secondly, to foretell the punishment of that wickedness. A little reflection upon each of these particulars is necessary.

1. The wickedness here mentioned is withholding the fruits, and abusing the messengers sent to demand them: that is, hindering, or not promoting as they ought, obedience to God and his laws; and persecuting and murdering the prophets and Christ himself, who came to purge out the leaven of their corruptions, and to teach them the way of life more perfectly. But this is an accusation too general to give us a sufficient character of these men; and therefore it may be proper, from some other passages, to take a more distinct view, first of the vicious dispositions which led them to and confirmed them in this crime, and afterwards of the steps by which they proceeded in it.

Now we find our Lord, in the twenty-third of this Gospel, and some other passages in the evangelists, charging them home with covetousness and extortion, pride and envy, insatiable thirst of dominion, and insupportable tyranny in the use of it. But above all, of the vilest and most impudent hypocrisy; by which all their vices passed upon the people, and religion was made the tool of their most villainous designs. Hence they are compared to *whited sepulchres*¹; said to *make clean the outside of the cup and platter, but within to be full of extortion and excess*^m: they *enlarged their fringes and phylacteries*ⁿ, for the sake of gaining more respect at feasts, the chief seats in the synagogues, and greetings in the markets^o; and the length of their prayers was a *pretence for devouring widows' houses* with a better grace^p. When by this mask of sanctity they had established their authority

¹ Ver. 39.

^k Ver. 40, 41.

¹ Ch. xxiii. 27.

^m Ver. 25.

ⁿ Ver. 5.

^o Ver. 6, 7.

^p Ver. 17.

with the common people, they bound upon them heavy burdens, which themselves would not move with one of their fingers; they kept from them the key of knowledge, and shut up the kingdom of heaven; for they neither went in themselves, nor would they suffer them that were entering to go in⁹. To be short, they compassed sea and land to make though but one proselyte; and the result of all this wicked industry was the poisoning him with their own bitter zeal, and rendering him twofold more the child of hell than themselves²; that is, more implacably averse to the truth, and all that professed obedience to our blessed Master.

Thus did those treacherous husbandmen, instead of rendering, obstruct the fruits which the vineyard would otherwise have yielded. And for a better security to their own varnish of holiness, they blackened the messengers of their great Master, and made his Son in particular a monster of impiety in the eyes of all who were content to see through glasses of their holding. They traduced his whole behaviour, laid snares for him in common conversation: the respects at any time shewed him were made to serve some treacherous design; if asked to eat with them, the use of that civility was to catch something out of his mouth, that they might accuse him³; if complimented with *—Master, we know that thou art true, and teachest the way of God in truth*⁴; it is by them who make this unusual address in pursuance of a consultation, *how they might entangle him in his talk*. At other times they load his doctrine with imposture and blasphemy, his actions and discourse with phrensy and possession, and impute his miracles to a collusion with the devil. In all which instances of calumny and malice their success with the populace was such, that notwithstanding the sensible daily demonstrations of his power and goodness, notwithstanding the devout and unanimous acknowledgments of his mission and Messiahship (recorded in this very chapter⁵, and always freely made when from under the influence of their imperious guides), this most innocent, most beneficent Person, purely for being the heir, (the rightful demander of the fruits, and most dangerous obstructor of these usurped and innovating powers,) was, by the envy of the rulers and the implicit concurrence of the stupid multitudes, treated with the utmost indignity, arraigned and tried as a malefactor, sentenced to death as a seducer, seditious person, and traitor; and publicly executed as a common slave. So manifestly did the event prove at last, that what popular and specious pretences soever their wickedness might cover itself with, yet the true fruits of the vineyard were no part of their care. But the thought and intent that lay always at their hearts was, *Come, let us kill him, and let us seize on his inheritance*.

2. The other part of our Lord's design in this parable was, I said, to foretell the punishment of the persons concerned in it. Now that hath been already observed to consist in dispersing the Jewish people, breaking their polity, and carrying the gospel to the Gentiles. Concerning which I only make these two remarks, and leave the rest to my reader's application.

1. The first is, that the very calamity which the killing of our blessed Saviour was urged as a necessary expedient against became

⁹ Ver. 13.

² Ver. 15.

³ Luke xi. 54.

⁴ Matt. xxii. 15, 16.

⁵ Matt. xxi. 8, 9.

the consequence of this wicked murder: *If we let him thus alone, all men will believe on him; and the Romans shall come and take away our place and nation*^x. This was the popular argument for infusing fears and jealousies. And the inference from these, how groundless soever the entertaining of them were, naturally follows: *It is expedient for us that one man should die for the people, and that the whole nation perish not*^y. But God, whose overruling providence frequently traps the ungodly in the work of his own hands, ordained that very coming of the Romans in revenge for the innocent blood of his Son. So wretchedly is human policy mistaken, when contriving to secure past wickednesses by subsequent and greater: and so certainly is the ruin of any person or faction portended, when abandoned to such outrageous villainies as, by filling up the measure of their iniquities, precludes them at once from the pardon of God and from the countenance and compassion of every sober and good man.

2. My other remark concerns the extent of that punishment: which, far from being confined to the immediate actors or contrivers of this murder of God's Anointed, involved the whole nation of that age, and hath shed its venom upon the posterity of the Jews in all succeeding generations to this very day. So diffusive is the mischief of evil, done upon a pretence that *good may come*. And so cautious ought the men of honest meaning to be how they give in to the measures of popular and intriguing persons, who, when they cry loudest for the public and the people, have frequently confounded both, by irregular methods, meant only to promote a private or a party advantage.

I forbear any tedious enlargement on the occasion of this solemnity, because the parallel lies so fair in view that no impartial reader can miss it.

The dispositions and designs of our late demagogues prove the race of the Jewish Pharisees far from being extinct with their persons. The measures by them taken, and the horror of this day's blood, make it vain to say, *If they had lived in the days of those their fathers, that they would not have been partakers with them in the blood of the prophets*.

The just fate of our regicides, and the dismal confusions consequent to so black a crime, should be an effectual warning how vain an attempt it is to reform supposed or real abuses in government by treason or rebellion.

And the extent of the punishment predicted in this parable justifies our lamenting the sin of so guilty a day, and deprecating the judgments of Him *by whom kings rule*, at this or a yet much greater distance from a fact which, we have reason to fear, may have provoked a long succession of them. And if we act sincerely in these humiliations, we shall be very jealous of hearkening to the insinuations of those pretended patriots, who, by extenuating this horrid act, and vindicating the steps that led to it, warn us to look upon them as dangerous subverters of government in general, and enemies by principle (if they be men of any principle) to the present happy constitution of this particular Church and State.

THE TWENTY-NINTH OF MAY.

THE EPISTLE. 1 St. Peter ii. 11—17.

[The same with the third Sunday after Easter.]

THE GOSPEL. St. Matt. xxii. 16—21.

16 *And they sent out unto him their disciples^a with the Herodians, saying, Master, we know that thou art true, and teachest the way of God in truth, neither carest thou for any man: for thou regardest not the person of men.*

17 *Tell us therefore, What thinkest thou? Is it lawful to give tribute unto Cæsar, or not?*

18 *But Jesus perceived their wickedness, and said, Why tempt ye me, ye hypocrites?*

19 *Shew me the tribute money. And they brought unto him a penny.*

20 *And he saith unto them, Whose is this image and superscription?*

21 *They say unto him, Cæsar's. Then saith he unto them, Render therefore unto Cæsar the things which are Cæsar's; and unto God the things that are God's.*

COMMENT.

THE scripture last insisted on is said, in the chapter next before, to have provoked the Pharisees so highly, that they deliberated upon methods proper for destroying so bold a rebuker as Jesus. The reverence and esteem justly paid him by the people rendered open violence an impracticable and too dangerous expedient.

What therefore they durst not attempt by force, they hope to compass by subtlety. And considering how free he was in delivering his opinion, they lay a snare to *entangle him in his talk* (ver. 15); and had ordered the matter so as to fancy themselves sure of him. For the more perfect understanding of which wicked project, and of the wisdom of our Lord's evading it, it may not be amiss to trace this matter a little higher, and observe the whole intrigue. Now this will best appear by considering (1.) the quality of the persons sent to attack him, (2.) the state of the question they propounded, and (3.) the occasion of their pretended doubt in it.

1. The persons who were to undertake our Saviour upon this occasion are said to be disciples of the Pharisees with the Herodians. By the latter of which are commonly, and most probably, supposed to be meant partisans and favourers of Herod. But what their principle was, as to the matter now in hand, is not so generally agreed. Some think them enemies to the Roman government, and that they only watched a favourable opportunity of making Herod's family absolute. Others think them entirely in the interest of the emperor, as Herod himself now was. For, having by his indulgence been advanced to the regal state, he acted for and under him in collecting the customs and public duties. This latter opinion, as it is more commonly enter-

^a See the Comment.

tained, so is it more agreeable to the Pharisees' design. For had the persons sent here been all of one sense, Christ might very easily have satisfied them all. But the address and cunning of the Pharisees seems to have lain chiefly in the management of their messengers. For by sending men of different judgments, they made it impossible to content both parties: and what resolution soever he gave, the one or the other sort would not fail to take advantage of his answer.

2. How reasonable it was for them to expect this will presently appear from a state of the question truly taken, which seems to be thus: The government of the Jews having fallen into the hands of the Maccabees, and, in succession, to one of them named Alexander, he left two sons, Hyrcanus and Aristobulus. The younger of these made war upon the elder, and assumed to himself the kingdom. Hyrcanus and his faction, who were not able to resist him, called in the assistance of the Romans. Pompey, at their request, besieges Jerusalem, and had the gates surrendered to him by Hyrcanus's party. But Aristobulus and his adherents fought it out, till at last they were vanquished and overpowered. The Romans hereupon put Hyrcanus in possession of the government, yet so as to hold it by their favour and permission. This proceeding created great and lasting dissensions among the Jews. Some submitting to the Roman power, and thinking they had a fair title both by conquest and surrender: others objecting that the surrender was made by a party only, and not the whole body of the people; that it was not conquest, but treachery, which brought Jerusalem to their mercy, and consequently that they were usurpers, and Hyrcanus and his followers betrayers of their country. Now according to what was said before, the Herodians appear to have been for the Roman power, and the Pharisees against it. And since the paying of tribute was, according to their sense, an acknowledgment of the power, this difficulty presses any positive answer to the question. Since, in determining for the payment, Christ must give offence to the Pharisees, and in effect renounce those liberties and privileges which some Jewish doctors insisted upon; and in pronouncing against it, he was sure to incur the Herodians' displeasure, and render himself obnoxious to the jurisdiction of the civil sword.

3. That which added yet more to their doubt in this matter was what Josephus and Eusebius relate concerning Judas the Gaulonite. He, about the time of the taxation, in which, St. Luke says, our Saviour was born, disquieted the minds of many, and represented that decree of Augustus as a mark of infamy and servitude which ought not to be borne. This man is said to have instituted a particular sect; one of whose tenets was, that no Jew ought to pay tribute, or acknowledge any sovereign lord but God only. That they were his peculiar people, and therefore bound to maintain their liberty, especially against profane and uncircumcised pretenders, such as the Roman emperors were. So that the paying of tribute to Cæsar was not at this time a question of mere curiosity, but a matter of moment with regard to practice; such as had been warmly disputed, and engaged many on both sides. Nor was it a point of mere bravery, in the esteem of the Pharisees, and others of that party; but a scruple

of conscience, and a debate of religion, whether this tribute should be paid or no. No, nor yet was this controversy about submitting to foreign governors a point first started by Judas, but seems to have been much more ancient; and some footsteps of it to be found among, not the Maccabees only, but even those Jews who so obstinately refused to submit to the Chaldeans when they besieged Jerusalem.

For further clearing of this matter, I observe, that the tribute money here does by no means appear to be the same with that which our Saviour paid for himself and Peter at Capernaum. That was the half shekel which every man above twenty years old paid to the use of the temple; and which, though first ordained by God at building the tabernacle (Exod. xxx. 13.), yet did not cease with it, but continued to be yearly collected till the time of Vespasian: and he, Josephus says, transferred it from the service of the temple at Jerusalem to that of the Capitol at Rome. Now the consequence of this is, that the Pharisees might have some pretence to quarrel with the *census* or tribute money here, though they without any difficulty paid that mentioned in the seventeenth of this Gospel. Our Saviour submitting to that then would not prejudice him in favour of this, because that was not a tribute to Caesar, nor of his imposing, but a sum levied for religious uses, and of a date as ancient as Moses. That belonged to them as Jews, and the people of God; this burden spoke them a conquered nation, and under the yoke of the Romans. This therefore was looked upon as a reflection upon that honour and liberty of their country which they thought it even religious to assert, and, as much as in them lay, to preserve from violence.

The true state of the question being thus explained, let us now proceed to consider with what address and dexterity our blessed Saviour returned his answer. Which the two and twentieth verse tells us was so managed, that his enemies, to their great astonishment, found their malicious designs utterly disappointed, and despaired of exposing him to the just censure of either of the opposite parties. To this purpose he first gives them to understand, that their treachery and falsehood were not hid from his discerning eye; that the formal commendation they gave of his sincerity and courage in declaring the truth, he saw through; and was well aware that they sought not their own satisfaction, but his mischief: *Jesus, perceiving their wickedness, said, Why tempt ye me, ye hypocrites? Shew me the tribute money. And they brought unto him a penny^b.* A penny; that is, a Roman coin current at that time among them in trade, and such as the *census* or poll-tax, now under deliberation, was wont to be paid in. Still he determines nothing, but, in marvellous prudence, draws them on by concessions out of their own mouths: *He saith unto them, Whose is this image and superscription? They say unto him, Caesar's. Then saith he unto them, Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's; and unto God the things that are God's^c.* That is, this signature and stamp does, by your own acknowledgment, speak the money to be Caesar's; so that, in demanding a part of it back again, he asks for his own. This is not therefore to give, so properly as to restore;

^b Ver. 18, 19.

^c Ver. 20, 21.

and whatsoever any person hath a title to, you are obliged to render him. You will do well therefore rightly to consider the obligations you lie under, and to discharge them faithfully in their several kinds, that both your earthly and your heavenly King may have what belongs to each, and so neither of them may be defrauded, upon pretence of not being just to the other.

Which way this answer inclined was sufficiently plain to any that would impartially consider it. But the terms are so cautious and general, that his accusers took a liberty of interpreting them so as from hence to form a charge against him before Pilate. For it is most likely they referred to this very passage in those words, Luke xxiii. 2, *We have found this fellow perverting the nation, and forbidding to give tribute to Cæsar.* And this sense they then fastened upon the place, notwithstanding the natural and common acceptation of it be directly contrary. And indeed the force of it seems to lie principally in these three particulars :

First, that as God had his rights, so had Cæsar likewise his.

Secondly, how Cæsar's right evidenced itself, and whence it was to be gathered.

Thirdly, that these rights are distinct.

They do not, in their own nature, interfere, and therefore men must take care not to confound them, but discharge their debt and duty to both. In all which I would fain hope it needless to add, that what this passage intends of Cæsar in particular must in proportion be understood of all kings and civil governors in general.

1. First, we are plainly taught from hence, that as God had his right, so had Cæsar also his. That God hath a right over us and all ours, is a truth so manifest, that every one who considers him as a Creator and himself as a creature cannot any longer dispute it. For natural reason will draw this inference, that he who is the Maker must of necessity be the Lord and Proprietor of all things. Nor was there any occasion for proving this to the Pharisees, since the very taking of God's right for granted, and understanding that in too strict a sense, was the very foundation of their refusing tribute to Cæsar. They imagined his property in them so incommunicable, that no person upon earth, who was not in the true religion, could have a just pretence to challenge any part of what was theirs. For we are to observe, that the marks of submission refused to Cæsar, the Jews were not so weak or so capricious to deny to a king of their own country and their own persuasion. They allowed such to rule from and under God ; but since he had singled this people out from the whole world, and distinguished them by the knowledge of himself and the truth, they could not suffer themselves to think that a stranger to the true faith could ever have this trust committed to him by God. When their fortune therefore reduced them to live under any such, they thought their power usurpation, and themselves at liberty to dispense with the acknowledgments of their obedience to them. Thus what was most willingly paid to a David or a Josiah, or a Judas the Maccabee, or to their own high priests, when the administration of the civil government was lodged in them, the same was disputed, and

by many thought unlawful to be paid to Cæsar. Notwithstanding all which, our Saviour, having from their own confession extorted thus much, that the money they then used bore the image of Cæsar, grounds his rule here upon that, and argues in effect thus: If the coin you use be confessedly Cæsar's, then somewhat you acknowledge is his. Now whatever is so must be rendered to him, whether in point of tribute, or in any other instance of the preeminence and rights due to sovereignty.

That government itself is the institution and ordinance of God, St. Paul hath assured us most expressly in the thirteenth to the Romans, where he makes this an argument for *every soul's being subject unto the higher powers; because there is no power but of God: and the powers that be are ordained of God.* And reason indeed will tell us that this argument alone can bear the weight laid upon it there by the apostle. For no other can oblige all souls to subjection, but He only whose all souls are. And whatever convenience men might find in submitting, yet, unless rulers were *God's ministers*, there could never be any lasting and necessary tie of obedience. Upon any other foot, people might be subject for interest; but their being *appointed of God* is the only consideration that can engage us to be subject *for conscience sake.* Because God only can bind and is Lord of the conscience; which can of right submit to no commands but his, as they are issued either immediately from himself, or else from those that act and hold under him.

So much therefore as God hath given to governors, so much and no more is their due. And we cannot suppose that so wise a Being would institute a thing of such consequence to the world as government is, without appropriating to it all those perquisites which are needful to its maintenance and support. Whatever then appears of necessity to this purpose, all that we may fairly conclude belongs to them who are invested with it. For example; men, it is evident, must be restrained from rapine and violence and fraud, and whatsoever else their own partial and extravagant desires would be apt to put them upon, to the prejudice of peace, society, and order. But a bare sense of duty is not sufficient to render any laws of justice and equity effectual. Consequently, some enforcement must unavoidably be given to these laws, such as may prove a terror to offenders, by mulcts and punishments and bodily pains, and make men honest in their own defence. Now the power of executing and inflicting these is what we commonly call the civil sword. A power so essential to the good of mankind, that no regular society hath ever been without it. And accordingly the apostle reckons this as one of the particular appointments of God: *He is the minister of God to thee for good. But if thou do that which is evil, be afraid; for he beareth not the sword in vain: for he is the minister of God, a revenger to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil.* ver. 4.

The public necessities of the people are, or ought to be, their governor's chief care; and a care they are so great, as to devour his time and his rest. The defending them from insults and invasions from abroad, the keeping them composed and easy, and dispensing justice at home, are matters of vast consequence and trouble and expense. Now in regard the benefit of these is public, it is very reasonable the

public should sustain and provide for the charge of their own security. And this comes home to the case before us. The same St. Paul urges the commission of God, and the equity of bearing this part of the burden too. For since we are the object of their constant care, we ought to supply, nay to reward that care; ver. 6: *For this cause pay ye tribute also: for they are God's ministers, attending continually upon this very thing.* The same is to be said of fear and reverence and due respect: all which conduce, and indeed are needful, to the defence and security of our governors; and they are therefore summed up together briefly in the seventh verse: *Render therefore to all their dues: tribute to whom tribute is due; custom to whom custom; fear to whom fear; honour to whom honour.*

Once more; because it is not possible for the greatest human prudence to make laws so perfect as shall provide against every inconvenience, and suit the circumstances of every particular person within its jurisdiction; and since those laws, when wisely made, yet cannot be always so nicely administered but that some personal hardships will follow upon the execution of them; it is also necessary to tie up the hands of froward and angry men from revenge and seditious insurrections upon such provocations. Hence therefore they are called upon to consider whose yoke it is they wear, and how guilty those false pretenders to liberty are who petulantly kick or cast it off every time it pinches them. For no throne can be stable, no prince secure, no society durable, upon those terms. The contrary methods of meekness and patience and quiet submission, and enduring private wrongs and oppressions, rather than to destroy the public peace and order settled by God, are therefore strictly pressed at the second verse of that chapter under the severest penalties: *Whosoever therefore resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God: and they that resist shall receive to themselves damnation.*

In the meanwhile, when the gift and appointment of God are so often mentioned, this is not to be interpreted of any miraculous or personal designation from above. For though there be some instances of this kind among the Jews, yet they were an exception to all mankind besides. That the original causes of politic societies were, the confusion which arose from multiplied families and numerous branches; the corruption of nature, which incited men to injure and defraud and spoil one another; and the consent of submitting to one common head, who should govern and judge between them; though it hath never yet been fully proved, might however be granted without allowing those wild consequences, for the sake whereof so many popular modellers of government are fond of laying its foundation there. For even this way it is most probable that kingly government was the first of all others, as nearest resembling that domestic and paternal one, which from the increase and irregularity of men was become useless and insufficient. The difference of places and tempers and other circumstances in the people; the abuse of power to tyranny and insufferable oppression; the decay and failure of families; and other such considerations, wherein the prince is concerned; seem to have been the causes why, in process of time, neither all parts of the world had the

same form of government, nor the same countries always continued in the same. But still in all these cases, where men are supposed to have parted with their original liberty at first; where they came upon terms for their better safety and more equal distribution of justice afterwards; where they have devised more convenient constitutions; those several constitutions are God's ordinances. Their wholesome laws have his sanction: he bestows that power over their lives and persons which themselves never had: he decrees how and by whom his own world shall be ruled; but he uses men as his instruments in executing this decree. Whether men therefore are ruled by one or by many, still it is God that rules them. Whether they who rule attain the government by lineal descent, or by popular election, or by conquest, or by surrender, or by compact and treaty, still it is God that gives it; and the several constitutions of several countries, the victories and successes and events which his providence affords, are but so many several ways of giving it. Thus we are positively told in Scripture, that *he setteth up one and pulleth down another^c—that he ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever he will^d—that he changeth the times and the seasons, he removeth kings and setteth up kings^e—that for the transgression of a land the princes thereof are many^f, and strangers are made to have dominion over them; and the like.* So it was frequently with the Jews; so it was particularly at this very time in the case of Cæsar, whose right to receive tribute was the question now depending; and it is of some importance to observe what my

2. Second particular proposes, which is, how Cæsar's right to some things among the Jews evidences itself to us, and whence we may gather it according to our Saviour's reasoning.

Now for the asserting of this, he goes not about to unravel all the niceties of Cæsar's title, either to the empire of Rome, or to that over Judæa. He disputes not the invitation of Hyrcanus, the dedication made by his faction, or the conquest of Aristobulus and his followers, who kept the city as long as they could, and fought it out against Pompey's army. And yet he knew all these might be objected by dissenting persons of the Pharisees' party. But all the foundation he thought necessary to proceed upon is this of Cæsar's image and superscription upon the current coin of the country. And the main stress and strength of that argument, so far as I apprehend it, lies in this:

Mankind, when they cemented into societies, soon found the necessity of traffick with one another, that so each might be furnished with what he had not within himself. This was at first carried on by way of truck and bartering of goods; but because it was not easy to fix a valuable consideration upon commodities which would be sure to rise and fall in exchange according as the person with whom one dealt had more or less occasion for them, upon this and some other accounts they found it convenient to pitch upon a common standard, which should answer all things; and that is what we call *money*.

^c Psalm lxxv. 7.

^d Dan. iv. 25.

^e Dan. ii. 21.

^f Prov. xxviii. 2.

^g Ezek. xi. 9. xxviii. 7.

Now since even this was liable to deceit, by mixing, adulterating, and counterfeiting, or by otherwise diminishing the metal, it was further contrived that some certain marks should be impressed upon it, whereby every man might know that he was not imposed upon in the worth and the quantity of what he received. And because this testimony was of great and public consequence, nothing less was thought a sufficient assurance than the public faith. Hence, generally speaking, the supreme governor hath always been intrusted with the valuation and coinage of money. Hence the present ruler's impress hath been fixed upon it; and does, as it were, speak it to be worth what it pretends to. Hence, without some notorious defect, the subjects within their respective dominions are not only content, but bound to accept it as such in payments. Hence, lastly, the embasing, diminishing, or counterfeiting of such money hath been very justly punished by most laws with great severities, and by ours with death: it being construed treason thus to abuse the stamp and usurp a prerogative peculiar to the chief magistrate. Since then the case of coin was thus in Judæa^h; since the Jews accepted and trafficked with Cæsar's money, and held it current in all payments with them; nay, since upon some occasions they were obliged to use this, and the Jewish shekels would not pass; (as in that of their tribute particularly;) this was a constructive acknowledgment of Cæsar's being in possession of them, and that he was their supreme lord at that time. Besides, he indulged them the exercise of their religion and the enjoyment of their civil rights; he fought their battles, and protected them against the common enemy, the Arabians and Parthians, and the like. And therefore, as well in consideration of the benefits they received from him, as because he was by that providence of God, which in a peculiar manner disposes of kingdoms, their sovereign at that time; something was here declared to be his due, that is, the tribute, and such other acknowledgments as belong to the state and dignity of that post. Thus our Saviour then advised the Jews; thus, we are told, the primitive Christians behaved themselves; and if I am mistaken, either in matter of fact, or in the reason of the thing, I will shew you that I err at least after the authority of judicious and excellent persons. To which end my reader hath two observations upon this passage in the margin; and with them the close of my second particular: "This law we plainly see the ancient Christians set themselves, to pay faith and allegiance to any person whatsoever in possession of the government; and not take to any party or person who, under specious pretences, were for making alterationsⁱ." And upon the twentieth verse—"The very money, which had its valuation from Cæsar's edict, and carried his face and name upon it, was an evidence that Cæsar was at that time actually possessed of the supreme power

^h Quæmadmodum Cæsaris nummum esse, imago Cæsaris docebat, ita potestatem ejus, et quid illi deberetur nummus cum imagine præfixus, neque minus tamen servientis, vel docebat, vel docere debebat. Heinsii Exercit. in ver. 20.

ⁱ Grot. in ver. 16. Atque hanc legem videmus sibi præscripsisse Christianos veteres, ut cuivis imperium nacto, fidem atque obedientiam præstarent, neque ulli sub speciosis nominibus res novanti accederent.

over Judea; and that the Jews, who used that money, acknowledged so much. It might indeed be objected that the Romans ruled over the Jews and Caesar over the Romans, in fact, but that they had no right to do so. But Christ shews that this objection signifies nothing to the matter in hand. For since peace cannot be secured without forces, nor forces had without pay, nor pay without taxes or tribute; it follows, that tribute ought to be paid to the person actually governing, so long as he continues to govern; in consideration of the common safety and protection which are secured by the present possessor of the government, whoever that possessor be^k."

I am sensible what hath been objected to fixing such a meaning on our blessed Lord, and how injurious a doctrine it is represented to rightful princes in distress from rebellious and usurping powers. But waving other arguments for the reasonableness of thus understanding and inferring from this passage, it shall suffice to say at present, that, supposing subjects to act conscientiously, and upon the principles here laid down, no rightful governor can be dispossessed. And sure it were most unequal reasoning to charge upon the interpretation of any scripture those hardships which can never happen till men have acted in direct opposition to the text so interpreted.

III. I shall detain my reader very little upon the third observation, that these rights of God and Caesar are distinct. There is a debt of duty to both, and the discharge of each is enjoined by our Lord, when to *Render therefore unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's*, he adds, *and unto God the things that are God's*. The same reason indeed enforces both, for we have God's image and superscription too. He hath stamped his own character and likeness upon our souls, and reserved to himself the property of these. Whatsoever claim our governors may have to the temporal and outward possessions, the liberties, the estates, the bodies of their subjects, they derive it from above. But the original Lord of all we have or are hath not communicated a power over our minds; nor could they, in the nature of the thing, lie under any jurisdiction but his own. Hence it is our blessed Lord's advice, not to *fear men, who, after they have killed the body, have no more that they can do*; but to *serve and fear him, who, after he hath killed, can destroy both body and soul in hell*. And he esteems himself well served with regard to the matter now before us, when we pay all fidelity and obedience in temporal causes to the persons by him set over us, provided care be taken that he still reign supreme, and that those things wherein religion and our consciences are properly concerned be kept inviolate.

That *we must obey God rather than man*^l is an express limitation

^k Ipse igitur nummus, pretium habens ex edicto Caesaris, Caesarisque nomen et cultum preferens, testatur Caesarem summum in Judeam imperium reipse obtinere, idque a Judæis nummo illo utentibus agnosci. Objici poterat, ipso quidem facto Romanos Judæas et Caesarem Romanis imperasse, at nullo jure. Sed Christus ostendit, hoc ad propositam questionem nihil pertinere. Nam, cum nec quies gentium sine armis, nec arma sine stipendiis, nec stipendia sine tributis haberi possint; sequitur, ei, qui imperat, tantisper tam imperat pendenda tributa; ut pretium communis tutelæ, quam prestat nobis, quisquis est publici imperii possessor.

^l Acts v. 29.

both of the chief magistrate's power, and of the subject's compliance, left us by an authority not to be disputed. Further than this the Scripture hath not gone, so far as I can perceive. And the ministers of Christ who publish other schemes of liberty seem to exceed the bounds of their rule, and to be out of the business of their function. For the gospel nowhere projects new constitutions, but consults the public peace of those already in being, by enjoining order and unity, meekness and submission. It forbids rulers to invade, and it equally forbids subjects to encroach. It allows all liberty that is Christian and lawful; but it wisely forbears to determine the utmost point of that liberty: the Spirit, by whom it was dictated, well knowing the corruption and pride of men's hearts, and how prone they always are to turn liberty into licentiousness. It therefore contents itself with commanding in general terms an active obedience, where that can be paid without sin; and where that cannot be paid, it commands such submissions as are due to powers instituted and *ordained*, not by the people, but by *God himself*^m. It calls indeed the governors an *ordenance of man*ⁿ, with regard to the benefits of human society promoted by them to the next immediate instruments of their establishment, and to those civil constitutions and laws whence the measures of their administration are taken. But it nowhere says, or warrants us to say, that men are the source and original cause of those powers; or that, in case of maladministration, subjects have right to revenge, or reform abuses by such outrageous wickedness and impious rebellion as the solemnities of this day commemorate our most happy deliverance from.

May the sincerity of these praises for a mercy so valuable to us and our posterity be manifested in loyal principles and godly lives. And may we of the present generation in particular, instead of indulging nice and dangerous, but now sure most unnecessary speculations, how far we may disobey or oppose our governors, act like men truly sensible, that, besides the ties of conscience, it is our felicity to be most strongly bound by those of gratitude. So shall our excellent Queen receive that cheerful obedience which is a debt to her most pious and gentle administration; a fit tribute of thanks for that, among other glorious effects, in which this day of joy hath been fruitful, and an insurance of future blessings, which our God, even the God of order and peace, shall give to a people willing and dutiful to Him, and to the prince he sets over them, for his sake.

^m Rom. xiii. 1.

ⁿ 1 Pet. ii. 13.

THE EIGHTH DAY OF MARCH.

*Being the Day on which Her Majesty Queen Anne began her
happy reign.*

THE EPISTLE. 1 Peter ii. 11—17.

THE GOSPEL. St. Matt. xxii. 16—22.

THE scriptures for this occasion being likewise appointed on the twenty-ninth of May, nothing remains but to refer my reader thither; and earnestly to beg the concurrence of his prayers, that God would long continue this joyful solemnity to us.

A THREEFOLD TABLE.

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